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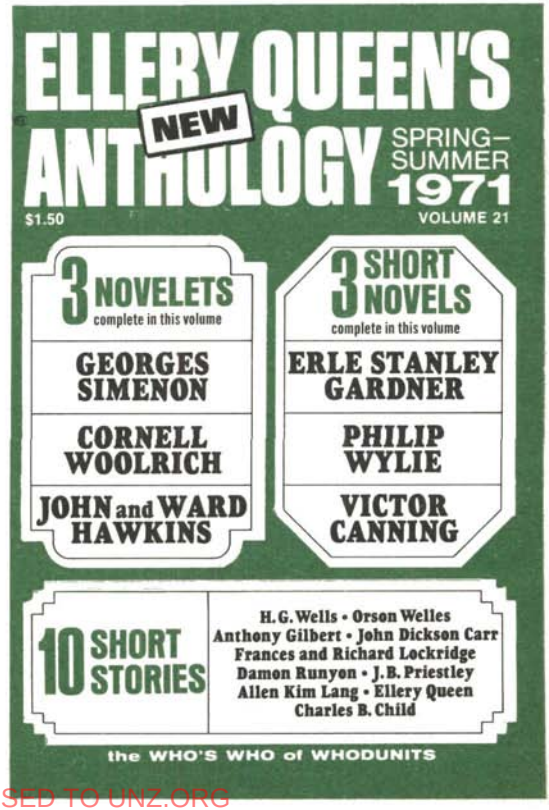

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COUNTERFEIT FOR MURDER	Rex Stout	22-92

SHORT STORIES: Crime, Detection, Spy

THE SPY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH	Edward D. Hoch	6
SAM BURIED CAESAR	Josh Pachter	57
THE TREFOIL COMPANY	Avram Davidson	69
AN ACT OF DELIVERANCE	Nedra Tyre	77
TURNPIKE ROULETTE	Henry T. Parry	111
MURDER WILL OUT	Edward Wellen	119
THE WORLD'S SMALLEST LOCKED ROOM	Clayton Rawson	120
THE LADY OF THE AFGHANS	Florence V. Mayberry	131
THE WILL-O'-THE-WISP MYSTERY (The Queen)	Mr. X	146

EQMM "FIRST STORY" — #357

NIGHTMARE IN NEW YORK	Jeff Sweet	84
HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH		110
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	75

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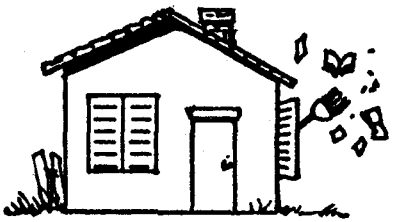

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a NEW Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Major Gregory Subic, an old man now, had a story to tell about the closing days of World War II. Even after a quarter of a century the revelation could be a bombshell with resulting international complications. Heads could roll, governments topple . . .

Rand—code and cipher specialist, detective by necessity, and now troubleshooter-at-large—was assigned to persuade the old man that he knew too much for the world's good, that it would be safer for all concerned to let sleeping dogs sleep . . .

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THE SPY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"What do you know about Major Gregory Subic?" Hastings asked, pouring two glasses of wine from the decanter in his study.

Rand, who was unaccustomed to the luxury of a dinner with Hastings, accepted the glass and took a sip before replying. "When I started in the Department of Concealed Communications, he was something like a god, or at least a founding father. There's a photograph of him, taken with Churchill, still hanging in my office. Is he alive?"

Hastings nodded. "He's alive. Living in Canada, writing his memoirs."

Rand gave a low whistle. "That's a book I'll want to read!"

"Unfortunately the British government is not quite so eager. In fact, the publication of the book could provoke a serious diplomatic incident."

"In what way?"

Hastings puckered his lips

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distastefully. "What I am telling you is quite confidential, known only to a few top people."

"I understand." Rand took another sip of the wine.

"Major Subic was a front-line intelligence officer in Burma until he was wounded and shipped back to London. Here he became one of our top cryptanalysts during the final days of the Second World War. In fact, he headed the department which has since developed into your own Double-C, as you well know. Just after the Battle of the Bulge, Subic succeeded in deciphering a particularly important Nazi communication. It seemed that some German generals, always unhappy with Hitler, agreed to meet secretly with a former leader of the French Underground. The French leader was to fly to Berlin with General Hans Holder, for a conference on ending the war.

"This was the situation which confronted British Intelligence as the result of Subic's decipherment: they had the exact route and timetable of the German bomber carrying a top Nazi general and a highly respected French resistance leader. The mission of the Frenchman might end the war sooner, but Intelligence doubted its chances for success. Stacked against this was the fact that General Holder had helped plan Nazi strategy in the Bulge and might do the same thing again. It was a matter of one Frenchman's life against the lives of thousands of Allied soldiers."

"What are you trying to tell me?" Rand asked, feeling a sudden chill.

The older man shrugged. "The RAF was ordered to intercept and shoot down the plane. They did so, quite efficiently. General Holder was killed. And of course, the Frenchman, André Chambon, died too."

"Chambon," Rand repeated the name. "I see. If I remember correctly, he was as respected as De Gaulle at the time."

Hastings nodded. "And Holder was as skillful as Rommel. What would you have done under the circumstances?"

"I think I would have gambled on the success of Chambon's mission. But the decision, happily, wasn't mine to make."

"The incident became one of the footnotes of history, and something of a national tragedy for the French. Naturally we never admitted prior knowledge of the plane's occupants. It was simply written off as one of the fortunes, or misfortunes, of war."

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"And what happened to Major Subic?"

"Frankly, I believe he went to pieces over the incident. As you know, the European war ended in early May of 1945. About that time we heard a rumor that someone—perhaps Chambon—had survived the crash. Subic went to West Germany to investigate, but of course there was no truth to it. Chambon was dead and buried, and I think the shock of actually seeing his grave was a bit too much for Major Subic. In any event, he never returned to London. He resigned his commission and moved to Canada. He's been there ever since."

"And now he's writing his memoirs."

"Exactly. An American publishing house approached him some months back and made him a very liberal offer. In fact, they were so anxious to get the book they paid him a large advance before he'd written a single word. We can only suspect they have some knowledge of the bombshell such a book could be. You see, right now our relations with France are improving, and with all this Common Market business we can't risk ruining that. I know it was twenty-five years ago, but the French have long memories. Can you imagine the uproar in Paris if it was revealed that Britain deliberately and knowingly caused the death of a French hero?"

"Can't you stop him from having the book published?"

"Not officially. We don't dare hint we're concerned, or the American publisher would be more certain than ever that they're onto something big. That's where you come in, Rand."

He smiled slightly. "I knew we'd get to me."

"You must fly to Toronto and talk to him. He'll respect you, because you hold the closest thing to the position he held during the war. Bring him to his senses, even promise him money if you have to. Whatever else he writes about, he must not mention the Chambon affair."

"And if he won't listen?"

Hastings shrugged. "It's one man against the good of a nation."

Rand felt his face flush. "I'm damned if I'll act as your assassin!"

"Rand, Rand—I meant no such thing!"

"All right," he said, calming down. "I've always wanted to visit Canada."

The next morning, in his office, he studied the photograph of the handsome, dark-haired man standing in full

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uniform at the side of Winston Churchill. Major Gregory Subic —a hero then, but now only an old man who knew too much.

The jumbo jet from London settled down to a perfect landing at Toronto International Airport, and Rand passed quickly through the customs formalities. His hotel was downtown, across the street from the new City Hall, a dazzling structure with twin curving towers fronted by a wide and shimmering fountain. Rand studied it through the window as he unpacked, then telephoned the man he was to meet—a literary agent named Norman Browder.

They arranged to meet for dinner, and Rand killed the intervening hour with a stroll through downtown in the warmth of July sunshine. Despite some of the place names he had seen on the way in from the airport—Dickens Street and Princess Margaret Park and Gloucester Street—he felt that Toronto was more an American city than the London he'd left. There were occasional hints of the old, but only, it seemed, as an accent to the new.

The agent, Browder, was one of the new. He was a small man with a shaggy mustache and quick nervous eyes, and he seemed to know his business well. He was uncertain about the vague reasons for Rand's visit, and he spoke as if he could feel his commission slipping away with every sentence.

"If you want to see Major Subic about British rights to his book, I'm the man to deal with. He picked me out of the phone book after the New York publisher came to see him. I'm handling all business matters."

"It's more a personal matter," Rand assured him. "I have a job quite similar to Major Subic's old position in London."

The small man's eyes widened. "You mean, you're a spy?"

"No more than Major Subic was. We work with codes and concealed messages, not with people."

"I tell you, Subic is one tough customer! He trusts nobody. At first he didn't even want to do the book. I don't think he'd have agreed to it yet, except that he needs the money. He was teaching languages at the University, but he's too old for that now."

"I've talked with tough customers before," Rand said.

"Fine! Then I'll drive you out to his apartment. It's on Scarborough Bluffs, overlooking Lake Ontario. A fine location, right next to the Hunt

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Club's private golf course. He wants to keep that sort of life more than anything, but he needs money to do it."

Major Subic greeted them at the door of his apartment. He was a white-haired man of 65 or so with thin hands and pale frightened eyes. His wrinkled skin was tanned from the summer sun, but it was a sickly tan. There was no longer any evidence of the vigorous, dark-haired Englishman who had stood at Churchill's side so many years before. Even the eyes were different now, older, more weary.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Major," Rand said, extending his hand. "Your techniques are still highly regarded in London."

Subic smiled thinly in response and motioned them to seats by the window. Out across the lake they could see scattered yachts drifting with the evening breeze. "I am pleased to meet you too, Mr. Rand," Subic said, "but you must excuse me if I put you to a little test. In this business one does not reach my age without being careful. You could be an assassin from across the sea, sent to kill me."

Rand saw that the man was serious. He really feared for his life. "I'm hardly that. I have identification—"

"Papers can be so easily forged these days, Mr. Rand. If you are who you claim, certainly you can identify the following for me: H-21, Professor Zapp, and 0075."

Rand grinned, feeling a bit like a schoolboy. "Professor Zapp was the German technician who perfected and simplified the microdot during the early days of the Second World War. And 0075 was the German diplomatic code in which the famed Zimmermann telegram of World War I was sent."

"Very good! But I believe you neglected H-21."

"That was the German designation for one of their most famous spies—Mata Hari."

Major Subic relaxed in his chair, apparently satisfied. "Now we can talk," he said. "But first I must give my completed manuscript to Mr. Browder." He produced a bulky folder of typewritten sheets. "Take this back and read it. We don't need you here."

"I need him to get me back downtown," Rand said.

"I'll call a taxi for you." Subic waved a hand and the little agent retreated, the thick manuscript tucked under his arm. When they were alone, Subic poured two glasses of brandy and passed one to Rand. "Now tell me what you really want," he said.

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Rand cleared his throat, not knowing exactly how to put it. "Frankly, Major, there is some concern in London about your forthcoming book. They fear you may be indiscreet in discussing the Chambon matter in the closing days of the war."

The old face seemed to grow a shade whiter. "I understand their concern," Subic answered slowly, picking his words with care. "But the book deals mainly with my youth and later years in Canada. There is very little of the wartime years, and nothing that is not a matter of public record."

"Won't that disappoint your American publisher? He isn't paying all that money for your boyhood memories."

"No," Subic admitted, "he isn't. I believe he heard the rumors about Chambon from one of the RAF pilots who flew the mission—at least, that's what he told me. They thought I'd have the full story, so they came to me. But, believe me, I go into no great detail about it. The British Empire is in no way compromised."

There might have been a sardonic trace to his voice, but Rand chose to ignore it. He didn't really like the man, and that fact vaguely disappointed him. "London will be pleased," he said simply.

He stayed another half-hour, discussing the attractions of Canadian living, and then rode back downtown in a taxi Subic summoned. It had all been so easy—perhaps too easy. Would Subic really have glossed over an incident so shattering to him that he'd left his job and country because of it? The more Rand thought of it, the more unlikely it seemed.

Rand spent the rest of the evening exploring downtown Toronto, marveling at the number of movie theaters, at the swarms of young people who crowded the sidewalks. It was not too different from Times Square or Piccadilly on a summer's night, he decided.

Back at his hotel, slipping into bed just after midnight, he was startled by a tapping on the door. "Who's there?" he asked, opening it just a crack.

A slim young girl with long blonde hair and a pouting mouth stood there. "Please let me in—I must talk to you!"

Rand, acquainted with the techniques of call girls who worked the big hotels, hesitated. "I think you have the wrong room, Miss."

"You're Mr. Rand, aren't you? From London? I've been waiting for you all evening." She seemed close to tears. "I'm Marjorie Fleming, Mr. Browder's secretary."

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More curious than anything else, Rand opened the door. "All right," he asked when she was seated in the room's only chair, "what's this all about? Did Browder send you here?"

She shook her head, and in the light from the bedside lamp he saw that she was quite pretty, with soft pink skin just beginning to acquire a summer's tan. "He doesn't know I came. But I overheard him arranging to meet you, and I know you're a British agent of some sort. I'm afraid for him, Mr. Rand!"

He sat down on the edge of the bed. "Afraid?"

"I suppose I should start with my boy friend Terry. He's an American who came up here to escape the draft. He lives with some other American boys, and he's taking a writing course at the University. His teacher is a woman named Iris Montain. She's older, around fifty, and she knows just about everyone. She speaks to a lot of the youth groups around Toronto. Anyway, last week Terry happened to repeat to her what I'd mentioned about Major Subic's book. She told him Subic's life could be in danger, and my boss's too! She said some people from the past might not like the idea of him writing a book of memoirs."

"Major Subic was engaged in cryptography, hardly a line of work to inspire murder after so many years."

"I don't know, but that's what she told Terry!"

"Are you in love with this Terry?"

She twisted her hands nervously. "We'd be married if it wasn't for my family. They call him a hippie because his hair is long."

"Well, I think you're worrying needlessly, Miss Fleming. But if it'll make you feel better, I'll talk to Terry's teacher—this Iris Montain."

"Oh, thank you! I knew a British agent could help me."

He let her out and sank into bed, wondering about Iris Montain and her connection with Major Subic's past.

The University of Toronto was deep into its summer sessions, and Rand found the downtown campus alive with students. He had arranged to meet Iris Montain on the grassy quadrangle off King's College Road, and he found it a pleasant sunny place that reminded him of the little squares so common to British schools. He was studying the old stone buildings with their narrow windows when Iris Montain approached.

"You're Mr. Rand?" she asked. She was a striking woman who obviously took

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pains about her appearance, and each graying hair was exactly in place. He thought she'd probably been beautiful once.

"Do I look that much different from your students?" he asked.

"Quite a bit, actually," she said with a smile. "I'm Iris Montain. You wanted to see me?"

"I'm over from London for a few days," he explained. "I understand you have a student named Terry in one of your writing classes."

"That would be Terry Sandow. He's an American."

"His girl friend, Marjorie, says you know something about Major Gregory Subic."

"Well, Major Subic taught here at the University for a good many years. We were close friends, and still are. He told me stories about some of his experiences."

"Enough that you think his life may now be in danger?"

"He told me that once, years ago. He said there were things in his past life that could cost him his life."

"Did Subic ever marry here?"

"No," she answered, and looked away.

"He had no family in England either. No one close. It's strange."

"Some men are like that."

"What did he teach here?"

"Languages – English, French, German. He was very good."

Rand stared at the sky "His memoirs are finished—he delivered the manuscript to his agent last night. Do you fear for both their lives?"

She suddenly turned on him "Just why did the British send you here, Mr. Rand?"

He couldn't answer that, and he didn't bother to try. "We'll talk again. Thank you, Miss Montain."

He left her there and took a taxi across town to Browder's office on King Street East. It was only a ten-minute ride, but he reached the building with a growing sense of apprehension. Marjorie Fleming wasn't at her desk in the outer office, and Rand crossed quickly to Browder's door. The literary agent was at his desk, head bent over Major Subic's manuscript. A closed volume of memoirs by a Scotland Yard Inspector lay at his elbow.

"Hello, Rand. I've just been reading over the book. It's quite interesting."

"So I gathered. I wonder if I could read it myself."

Browder hesitated and closed the folder containing the manuscript. "That wouldn't be quite ethical at this stage of things. His publisher hasn't seen

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it yet, and I may have a few changes to suggest."

"A woman told me this morning that your life might be in danger because of it."

The little agent chuckled. "Who'd tell you a thing like that?"

"Her name is Iris Montain. She teaches at the University."

Browder nodded. "I've heard of her. She's something of a den mother to the hippies and American draft dodgers. The police questioned her once about helping them smuggle narcotics across the border."

He frowned and opened the manuscript once more, flipping over the pages until he found what he sought. "I thought so! Subic speaks of a woman named Iris here. He met her soon after he came to Toronto. There's no last name, but she taught at the University with him. She was his mistress for several years."

Rand stared out the window at the city. "I don't think she'll be happy about that chapter."

On his way out Rand saw that Marjorie Fleming was back at her desk. She was writing something on a piece of notepaper, and he caught a glimpse of it before she hurriedly covered it. *N.B. August Bear*, the note read. He wondered if *N.B.* stood for Norman Browder, and what his connection was with *August Bear*.

"Anything I can do for you, Mr. Rand?"

"No. I just wanted to tell you that I saw Iris Montain this morning. I'd like to see her again, and you too."

Marjorie Fleming hesitated, glancing again at the note she was covering with her hand. She seemed anxious to have him leave. "There's a meeting tonight of American students living in Toronto. Iris Montain is going to speak at it. Meet me at the corner of Yonge and Bloor at eight o'clock, and I'll take you along."

"It's a date," he told her.

She was smiling as he left, but it was a forced smile. She hadn't wanted him to see that note, and that was enough to make him curious about *N.B./ August Bear*.

Marjorie was waiting for him at the corner of Yonge and Bloor that evening, and she led him a block away to a big old movie theater that had recently been remodeled and split into two smaller ones. They went through the outer lobby and then through a door past the ticket taker.

"It's quite clever, really," she told him. "They cut up these big old theaters and nobody ever knows how much

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space is left over. We have a meeting room here that most of Toronto doesn't even know exists."

"Including the police?" he asked. They'd entered a low-ceilinged room where rows of folding chairs were set up in front of a small speaker's platform. The room was crowded and smoky.

"These meetings aren't illegal," she replied.

"But smoking marijuana is." The odor of it was unmistakable.

She waved the smoke away and found them some seats. "Some nights it's like this, with half the audience turned on." It didn't seem to bother her.

After a moment Iris Montain appeared, dressed in a neatly tailored summer suit. She stopped to chat with a few of the young people and finally made her way to the low platform at the front of the room. Rand had to admit that her talk was good. She spoke informally of peace and love and freedom, reaching her audience with every sentence. When it was over they applauded warmly, and clustered around her as sandwiches and pitchers of beer were brought out for refreshments.

"They're hungry," Rand commented to Marjorie.

"Smoking pot gives them an appetite." She waved to an approaching young man and motioned him over. "This is Terry, Mr. Rand."

He was a clean-cut youth with surprisingly short hair. Rand shook his hand and said, "From what I'd heard I was expecting more hair."

Terry grinned boyishly. "It's for crossing the border. The customs guys get uptight at long hair and start searching for pot right away."

"Do they find any?"

"Not on me. I'm clean."

"Then why bother to cut your hair short?" Rand asked logically.

The boyish eyes hardened with suspicion. "You a cop?"

"No."

"He's all right," Iris Montain said, coming up to join them. "He's just British."

Terry relaxed a bit, and after a moment Marjorie lured him away to the refreshments. "He's the one who's uptight," Rand observed.

Iris snorted. "You made him nervous. He's been running pot across the border for months, maybe some of the hard stuff too. I understand he has a big shipment to go over next month and doesn't know how to get it across. The customs men are wise to most of the tricks by now. They even stopped a wedding party last

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week and found a pound of hash."

"You encourage these activities?"

"Of course not, Mr. Rand! And happily most American youths here do not engage in them. But if I want to keep their friendship, to talk to them the way I did this evening, I can hardly report them to the police."

Rand glanced around, making sure no one could overhear them. "I was talking with Browder about the book. You didn't tell me you'd been Subic's mistress."

Her face went white. "Who said I was?"

"Subic wrote about it."

"That swine!"

"You should have told me. It explains your interest in Subic and his past."

"We were both so much younger then."

"Everyone was younger then."

"He used to sing to me—German songs that he'd learned from war prisoners. You know he was a front-line intelligence officer before he was wounded."

Rand nodded. "I know. Tell me something. You knew Subic well for a good many years. Do you think he really has fears about his past life? Do you think those fears would be great enough for him to leave some parts out of his book?"

"If he wrote about me I think he'd write about anything."

"That's what I think too," Rand told her. "I believe I'll talk to Browder again and try to get a look at that manuscript."

"Are you the one he fears, Rand? The man from his past?"

"No, I'm not from anybody's past."

He left the meeting hall and headed back to his hotel. Browder's home phone was listed in the local telephone directory, and Rand tried that number first. No one answered the ring, and he called the office next. Browder answered on the second ring.

"This is Rand. About Subic's manuscript—"

"Yes?" Browder's voice was tight with something like fear.

"I must have a look at it."

"Rand, there's something in the manuscript that could be very dangerous. It's—" There was a pause.

"What? Browder, what is it?" Rand was afraid of what the agent might tell him. He was afraid the Chambon affair was going to become public knowledge.

Browder's voice had broken off in mid-sentence. There was a noise, and then a scream. "*My*

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God!" the agent shouted into the phone. "*Hold her!*"

Then there was a loud crack that could only have been a gunshot. In another second the connection was broken. Rand grabbed the flat .380 automatic from his suitcase and headed for the door.

When Rand reached the office the inner door was standing open. Browder was crumpled behind his desk, shot once through the forehead. The manuscript was gone. Rand searched quickly, but it was nowhere to be found. He sighed and left the office exactly as it was, careful not to touch anything with his bare fingers.

He went downstairs to a pay phone and tried to call Iris and Marjorie at their homes. Neither answered. It was nearly an hour since he'd left them at the meeting. Either one could have got here in time to kill Browder.

He called Major Subic's apartment next. The phone rang for several moments before a tired voice answered. "Major, this is Rand. Somebody killed Browder tonight and stole your manuscript. Do you have a carbon copy?"

"What? Yes, of course. But who would kill him? Why?"

"Someone who doesn't want your book published. Someone who might come after the carbon copy. Look, I'll be right over. Don't let anyone in till I get there—not even an old girl friend."

"Rand?"

"Yes."

"How do I know *you* didn't kill Browder and take the manuscript?"

"That's a chance you'll have to take, Major." He hung up.

It was after eleven by the time he reached Subic's lake-front apartment. The white-haired man answered on the first ring, obviously frightened. "I can't believe it about Browder," he said.

"Whom did you mention in your book, Major? Any women besides Iris? Anyone who would kill to prevent its publication?"

"I mentioned women, of course. But I can't believe any of them would kill over it."

"Then it must be the Chambon affair. It gets down to that."

The old eyes were watching him. "I told you it's barely mentioned."

"Under the circumstances I can't believe you, Major. Browder found something in that manuscript of yours that greatly upset him. And probably caused his death."

"But who—?"

"I was talking to Browder

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when he was shot. His last words were *Hold her!* That not only implies that his killer was a woman, but also that a third person was with them in the office."

"You think it was Iris Montain?"

"She seemed upset that you'd write about your relationship. But there's another possibility. His secretary, Marjorie Fleming, was intent on making me believe Browder's life was in danger. That might have been a cover for her own plans. She was writing an odd note this noon that puzzled me. It said simply *N.B. August Bear.* Mean anything to you?"

Major Subic thought about it. "N.B. is Norman Browder?"

"I assume so."

"You think it's a code of some sort?"

Rand shrugged. "Doubtful, but she did want to hide it. Anyway, let's take a look at your copy of the manuscript."

"Certainly." Major Subic was just starting toward the bedroom when they heard a noise. "Someone's in there," he whispered to Rand.

Tugging the automatic from beneath his jacket, Rand sprinted for the bedroom. He was just in time to see a figure stumble through the glass doors that led to a ground-floor patio. "Stop!" he called out, then ran after the shadowy intruder. He could see it was a man now, carrying what looked like the copy of Subic's manuscript.

"Hold it!" Rand shouted. "I have a gun!"

The figure hesitated, started to turn, and Rand was on top of him. "I'm not armed!" the other gasped. "Don't shoot!" It was the voice of Marjorie's American friend, Terry Sandow.

Rand took the manuscript and ran his hands over the youth. He was unarmed. "You're in deep trouble," he said.

"Give me a break, Rand!" He tried to pull away, but Rand's grip was firm.

"Inside, come on!" Rand ordered.

Major Subic stood at the open glass doors, a Walther Luger in his hand. "Who is it?" he asked.

"His name's Terry. His girl friend was Browder's secretary." Subic lowered the gun but kept it in his hand, and Rand asked, "How about it, Terry? Ready to talk?"

The youth stared at the floor. "I don't know anything," he mumbled.

"He came for the carbon copy of the manuscript," Subic decided. "He and the girl must have killed Browder."

"Perhaps," Rand said, and

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he put away his gun.

"I didn't kill anyone!" Terry insisted. "We just heard about Browder on the radio!"

"Then who sent you for the manuscript?"

He bit his lower lip. "Iris Montain. She wanted it."

"I see."

"When she heard Browder was dead she was afraid someone would go after the carbon copy too. She wanted to get it first. She asked me to steal it from Major Subic because he wrote things in it about the two of them."

"I'll buy that explanation for the moment," Rand said.

"You believe him?" Subic asked incredulously.

"I believe him." Rand turned on the youth. "But what about *N.B. August Bear?*"

"What?"

"It was a note that Marjorie wrote. What does it mean?"

The young man flushed. "*N.B.* is New Brunswick. You can hunt bear in New Brunswick in the summer, and I'm going up there with some other guys in August. I asked her to check the hunting regulations for me."

"So you've taken up hunting?"

"Yes, I guess so," Terry mumbled.

"With a short haircut."

"I—I—"

"And the customs people won't even look twice when you cross the border with a dead bear on the car. If I remember my geography, New Brunswick borders on Maine, a perfect place to cross over with a dead bear stuffed with marijuana and hash."

"How did you—?"

Rand smiled. "Just putting things together. Marjorie had to have some reason for hiding that note, and Iris told me you had a shipment to go across the border. My only mistake was in thinking the *N.B.* linked it with Norman Browder."

"Then that should prove I didn't kill him. I hardly knew the man!"

"We'll see," Rand said. He picked up the manuscript and began leafing through it, looking for the passage about Chambon. The manuscript was neatly typed, with the characters black and sharp against the page. Something flashed in Rand's mind, and then all at once it hit him He knew the whole thing.

"This isn't a carbon copy," he said quietly. "It's the original manuscript."

The Luger in Major Subic's hand turned and pointed at him. "Yes, Mr. Rand, that's correct. It's the original, and that means I killed Norman Browder to get it back."

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Rand nodded. "It means something else too. It means that the real Major Subic has been dead for twenty-five years, and that you are General Hans Holder, late of the German army."

The white-haired man barely moved a muscle. The Walther automatic in his hand was steady. "You suddenly know a great deal," he said.

"Once I saw this was the original manuscript, the rest of it just fell into place. Even allowing for twenty-five years, you look nothing like the picture of Major Subic in my office. Even your eyes are different. You came here and taught German at the University. That in itself proves nothing, but you also used to sing German songs to Iris—songs you claimed to have learned from war prisoners. But the real Major Subic served only in Burma and London. He would have had no front-line contact with German prisoners, and no opportunity to learn their songs and their language so well. There was also the little quiz you gave me yesterday. The questions were all German-oriented, the sort of facts a high-ranking German officer would have known. And Browder's dying word was *Holder*, not *Hold her*. He died with your name on his lips, General."

The Walther moved between Rand and Terry. "Holder died in that plane crash. He was shot down by the British."

"I believe he survived, General. The real Major Subic heard rumors of a survivor and went to investigate, thinking it might be Chambon. But the Frenchman was dead. You were the survivor, General. The war had just ended, and people like you were being arrested for the war-crimes trials. You needed a way out of Germany. I think you killed Subic and took his identity. It was dangerous, but it was your only way out. Of course you couldn't return to London where Subic was known, so you resigned his intelligence job and moved to Canada to start a new life. Your English must have been quite good then, except for occasional lapses into German songs."

"If such a thing were true, why would I attempt to write Subic's memoirs?"

"That was your fatal mistake, of course. But when the American publisher approached you with the deal it seemed just too good to turn down. You had retired from teaching and you needed the money. Besides, after twenty-five years you had almost become Subic anyway. I can almost see you at the library, poring over old newspa-

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pers and war memoirs in which he was mentioned. You knew the publisher was mainly interested in the Chambon incident, and I imagine you filled out the rest of the book with transplanted memories of your own youth, plus the true story of your life in Canada. But you had to write something about the London years—the part you knew least well. I think this is where you tripped up.

"When I visited Browder at his office he had a volume of Scotland Yard memoirs on the desk next to your manuscript. I think you lifted wartime incidents from other books of memoirs, and from books on cryptography. Unfortunately, Browder recognized some as plagiarisms—he was probably checking one of them with the Scotland Yard book. That was what he meant by the manuscript being dangerous. It was dangerous to you, General, because it proved you weren't Subic.

"And once he knew that, he followed the same reasoning I did to deduce you were really Holder. When he accused you of this, you had to kill him and take back the manuscript. All this time, it wasn't Major Subic who feared the past, it was General Holder."

The white-haired man nodded slowly. "You are too smart for your own good, Mr. Rand. But twenty-five years is too long a time to go down the drain now. It may be too late to try me for war crimes, but there's still the murder of Major Subic. And I have a life here I don't want to lose." He shifted the gun slightly. "I think it can be made to appear that you two killed each other."

He was just raising the gun when Terry leaped. Holder turned and fired, and then Rand's own gun was out again, and he squeezed the trigger. Holder gasped and went down hard, fanning the wall with his blood.

"Are you hit?" Rand asked the youth.

"Just grazed me, but I think you killed him."

Rand put away the gun and walked to the telephone. He knew the outcome would be pleasing to London, but somehow it wasn't pleasing to him. He'd ended up being the man whom Holder-Subic had feared after all—the assassin from across the sea.

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a NERO WOLFE *detective* SHORT NOVEL *by*

REX STOUT

It started simply enough. a salty (and peppery) old character, the landlady of a theatrical roominghouse, comes to Nero Wolfe with a mysterious package; and there's Tammy (or Tamiris) Baxter, a going-to-be actress—but learn about her for yourself . .

Archie Goodwin was stumped. Nero Wolfe was almost stumped But leave it to Nero: he had an "inkling," a "surmise," a "faint intimation." He told Inspector Cramer that he also "had a stroke of luck." But Nero's "luck" is not where he finds it—it's where he looks for it. Nero knew how to "invite" luck, and where "to send the invitation" . . .

COUNTERFEIT FOR MURDER

by REX STOUT

My rule is never to be rude to anyone unless you mean it. But when I looked through the one-way glass panel of the front door and saw her out on the stoop, my basic feelings about the opposite sex were hurt. Granting that women can't stay young and beautiful forever, that the years are bound to show, at least they don't have to let their gray hair straggle over their ears or wear a coat with a button missing or forget to wash their face, and this specimen was guilty on all three counts. So, as she put a finger to the button and the door bell rang, I opened the door and told her, "I don't want any, thanks. Try next door." I admit it was rude.

"You would have once, Buster," she said. "Thirty years ago I was a real treat."

That didn't help matters any. I have conceded that the years are bound to show.

"I want to see Nero Wolfe," she said. "Do I walk right through you?"

"There are difficulties," I told her. "One, I'm bigger than

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you are. Two, Mr. Wolfe can be seen only by appointment. And three, he won't be available until eleven o'clock. That's more than an hour from now."

"All right, I'll come in and wait. I'm half froze. Are you nailed down?"

A notion struck me. Wolfe believes, or claims he does, that any time I talk him into seeing a female would-be client he knows exactly what to expect if and when he sees her, and this would show him how wrong he was.

"Your name, please?" I asked her.

"My name's Annis. Hattie Annis."

"What do you want to see Mr. Wolfe about?"

"I'll tell him when I see him. If my tongue's not froze."

"You'll have to tell me, Mrs. Annis. My name—"

"*Miss* Annis."

"Okay. My name is Archie Goodwin."

"I know it is. If you're thinking I don't look like I can pay Nero Wolfe, there'll be a reward and I'll split it with him. If I took it to the cops they'd do the splitting. I wouldn't trust a cop if he was naked as a baby."

"What will the reward be for?"

"For what I've got here." She patted her black leather handbag, the worse for wear, with a hand in a gray woolen glove.

"What is it?"

"I'll tell Nero Wolfe. Look, Buster, I'm no Eskimo. Let the lady in."

That wasn't feasible. I had been in the hall with my hat and overcoat and gloves on, on my way for a morning walk crosstown to the bank to deposit a check for $7417.65 in Wolfe's account, when I had seen her through the one-way glass panel aiming her finger at the bell button. Letting her in and leaving her in the office while I took my walk was out of the question. The other inhabitants of that old brownstone on West 35th Street, the property of Nero Wolfe except for the furniture and other items in my bedroom, were around but they were busy. Fritz Brenner, the chef and housekeeper, was in the kitchen making chestnut soup. Wolfe was up in the plant rooms on the roof for his two-hour morning session with the orchids, and of course Theodore Horstmann was with him.

I wasn't rude about it. I told her there were several places nearby where she could spend the hour and thaw out—Sam's Diner at the corner of Tenth Avenue, or the drug store at the

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corner of Ninth, or Tony's tailor shop where she could have a button sewed on her coat and charge it to me. She didn't push. I said if she came back at a quarter past eleven I might have persuaded Wolfe to see her, and she turned to go, and then turned back, opened the black leather handbag, and took out a package wrapped in brown paper with a string around it.

"Keep this for me, Buster," she said. "Some nosey cop might take it on himself. Come on, it won't bite. And don't open it. Can I trust you not to open it?"

I took it because I liked her. She had fine instincts and no sense at all. She had refused to tell me what was in it, and was leaving it with me and telling me not to open it—my idea of a true woman if only she would comb her hair and wash her face and sew a button on. So I took it, and told her I would expect her at a quarter past eleven, and she went.

When I had seen her descend the seven steps to the sidewalk and turn left, toward Tenth Avenue, I shut the door from the inside and took a look at the package. It was rectangular, some six inches long and three wide, and a couple of inches thick. I put it to my ear and held my breath, and heard nothing. But you never know what science will do next, and there were at least three dozen people in the metropolitan area who had it in for Wolfe, not to mention a few who didn't care much for me, so instead of taking it to the office, to my desk or the safe, I went to the front room and stashed it under the couch. If you ask if I untied the string and unwrapped the paper for a look, your instincts are not as fine as they should be. Anyhow, I had gloves on.

Also there had been nothing doing for more than a week, since we had cleaned up the Brigham forgery case, and my mind needed exercise as much as my legs and lungs, so walking crosstown and back I figured out what was in the package. After discarding a dozen guesses that didn't appeal to me I decided it was the Hope diamond. The one that had been sent to Washington was a phony. I was still working on various details, such as Hattie Annis' real name and station and how she had got hold of it, on the last stretch approaching the old brownstone, and therefore got nearly to the stoop before I saw that it was occupied.

Perched on the top step was exactly the kind of female Wolfe expects to see when I talk him into seeing one. The

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right age, the right face, the right legs—what showed of them below the edge of her fur coat. The coat was not mink or sable. As I started to mount she got up.

"Well," she said. "A grand idea, this outdoor waiting room, but there ought to be magazines."

I reached her level. The top of her fuzzy little turban was even with my nose. "I suppose you rang?" I asked.

"I did. And was told through a crack that Mr. Wolfe was engaged and Mr. Goodwin was out. Mr. Goodwin, I presume?"

"Right." I had my key ring out. "I'll bring some magazines. Which ones do you like?"

"Let's go in and look them over."

Wolfe wouldn't be down for more than half an hour, and it would be interesting to know what she was selling, so I used the key on the door and swung it open. When I had disposed of my hat and coat on the hall rack I ushered her to the office, moved one of the yellow chairs up for her, and went to my desk and sat.

"We have no vacancies at the moment," I said, "but you can leave your number. Don't call us, we'll call—"

"That's pretty corny," she said. She had thrown her coat open to drape it over the back of the chair, revealing other personal details that went fine with the face and legs.

"Okay," I conceded. "It's your turn."

"My name is Tammy Baxter. Short for Tamiris. I haven't decided yet which one to use on a theater program when the time comes. What do you think, Tammy or Tamiris?"

"It would depend on the part. If it's the lead in a musical, Tammy. If it packs some weight, O'Neill for instance, Tamiris."

"It's more apt to be a girl at one of the tables in the night-club scene. The one who jumps up and says, 'Come on, Bill, let's get out of here.' That's her big line." She fluttered a gloved hand. "Oh, well. What do you care? Why don't you ask me what I want?"

"I'm putting it off because I may not have it."

"That's nice. I like that. That's a good line, only you threw it away. There should be a pause after 'off.' 'I'm putting it off . . . because I may not have it.' Try it again."

"Nuts. I said it the way I felt it. You actresses are all alike. I was getting a sociable feeling about you and look what you've done to it. What do you want?"

She laughed a little ripple.

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"I'm not an actress, I'm only going to be. I don't want anything much, just to ask about my landlady. Miss Annis —Hattie Annis. Has she been here?"

I raised a brow. "Here? When?"

"This morning."

"I'll ask." I turned my head and sang out, "Fritz!" and when he appeared in the doorway to the hall I inquired, "Did anyone besides this lady come while I was out?"

"No, sir." He always sirs me when there is company, and I can't make him stop.

"Any phone calls?"

"No, sir."

"Okay. Thank you, sir." He went, and I told Tammy or Tamiris, "Apparently not. You say your landlady?"

She nodded. "That's funny."

"Why, did you tell her to come?"

"No, she told me. She said she was going to take something—she was going to see Nero Wolfe about something. She wouldn't say what, and after she left I began to worry about her. She never got here?"

"You heard what Fritz said. Why should you worry?"

"You would too if you knew her. She almost never leaves the house, and she never goes more than a block away. She's not a loony, really, but she's not quite all there, and I should have come with her. We all feel responsible for her. Her house is an awful dump, but anybody in show business, or even trying to be, can have a room for five dollars a week, and it doesn't have to be every week. So we feel responsible. I certainly hope—" She stood up, letting it hang. "If she comes will you phone me?"

"Sure." She gave me the number and I jotted it down, and then went to hold her coat. My feelings were mixed. It would have been a pleasure to relieve her mind, but of what? What if her real worry was about the Hope diamond, which she had had under her mattress, and she knew or suspected that Hattie Annis had snitched it? I would have liked to put her in the front room, supplied with magazines, to wait until the landlady arrived, but you can't afford to be sentimental when the fate of a million-dollar diamond is at stake, so I let her go.

Another consideration was that it would be enough of a job to sell Wolfe on seeing Hattie Annis without also accounting for the presence of another female in the front room. He can stand having one woman under his roof temporarily if he has to, but not two at once.

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At eleven o'clock on the nose the sound of the elevator came, then its usual clang as it jolted to a stop at the bottom, and he entered, told me good morning, went to his desk, got his seventh of a ton deposited in the oversized custom-built chair, fingered through the mail, glanced at his desk calendar, and spoke.

"No check from Brigham?"

"Yes, sir, it came." I swiveled to face him. "Without comment. I took it to the bank. Also my weakness has cropped up again, but with a new slant."

He grunted. "Which weakness?"

"Women. One came, a stranger, and I told her to come back at eleven fifteen. The trouble is, she's a type that never appealed to me before. I hope to goodness my taste hasn't shifted. I want your opinion."

"Pfui. Flummery."

"No, sir. It's a real problem. Wait till you see her."

"I'm not going to see her."

"Then I'm stuck. She has a strange fascination. Nobody believes in witches casting spells any more. I certainly don't, but I don't know. As for what she wants to see you about, that's simple. She has got something that she thinks is good for a reward, and she's coming to you instead of the police because she hates cops. I don't know what it is or where she got it. That part's easy, you can deal with that in two minutes, but what about me? Have I got a screw loose?"

"Yes." He picked up the top item from the little pile of mail, an airmail letter from an orchid hunter in Venezuela, and started to read it. I swung my chair around and started sharpening pencils that didn't need it. The noise of the sharpener gets on his nerves. I was on the fourth pencil when his voice came.

"Stop that," he growled. "A witch?"

"She must be."

"I'll give her two minutes."

You can appreciate what I had accomplished only if you know how allergic he is to strangers, especially women, and how much he hates to work, especially when a respectable check has just been deposited. Besides that satisfaction I had something to look forward to, seeing his expression when I escorted Hattie Annis in. I thought I might as well go and retrieve the package from under the couch and put it in my desk drawer, but vetoed it. It could stay put till she came. Wolfe finished the letter from the orchid hunter and started on a circular from a manufacturer of a humidifier.

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Eleven seventeen and the bell didn't ring. At 11:20 Wolfe looked up to say that he had some letters to give me but didn't like to be interrupted, and I said neither did I. At 11:25 he got up and went to the kitchen, probably to sample the chestnut soup, in which he and Fritz had decided to include tarragon for the first time.

At 11:30 I went to the front room and got the package. Nuts to her, if she couldn't be punctual for an appointment. She would get her package back, at the door, and that would be all. I was straightening up after fishing it from under the couch when the bell rang, and I had it in my hand when I went to the hall.

It was her all right, but through the one-way glass panel I noticed a couple of changes as I stepped to the door: there was a button on her coat where one had been missing, and her face needed washing even more than it had before. Her whole right cheek was a dark smudge. Touched by the button, I decided to hear her excuse for being late, if any, but as I opened the door she collapsed. No moan, no sound at all, she just crumpled.

I jumped and grabbed her, so she didn't go clear down, but she was out, dead weight. I tightened my right arm around her to free my left to toss the package into the hall and then gathered her up, crossed the sill, and kicked the door shut.

As I was turning to the front room Wolfe's voice came. "What the devil is that?"

"A woman," I said, and kept going. On her feet I would have guessed her at not more than a hundred and fifteen pounds, but loose and sagging she was a good deal heavier. I put her on the couch, on her back, straightened her legs, and took a look. She was breathing shallow, but no gasping. I slipped a hand under her middle and lifted, and stuffed a couple of cushions beneath her hips. As I took her wrist and put a finger on her pulse Wolfe's voice came at my back.

"Get Doctor Vollmer."

I turned my head. He had meant it for Fritz, who had appeared at the door. "Hold it," I said. "I think she just fainted."

"Nonsense," Wolfe snapped. "Women do not faint."

I had heard that one before. His basis for it was not medical but personal; he is convinced that unless she has a really good excuse, like being slugged with a club, any woman who passes out is merely putting on an act—a subhead under his fundamental principle that every

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woman is always putting on an act. Ignoring it, I checked her pulse, which was weak and slow but not too bad, asked Fritz to bring my overcoat and open a window, and went to the lavatory for the smelling salts. I was waving the bottle under her nose and Fritz was spreading the coat over her when her eyes opened. She blinked at me and started to lift her head, and I put my hand on her brow.

"I know you," she said, barely audible. "I must have made it."

"Only to the door," I told her. "You flopped on the stoop and I carried you in. Lie still. Shut your eyes and catch up on your breathing."

"Brandy?" Fritz asked me.

"I don't like brandy," she said.

"Tea?"

"I don't like tea. Where's my bag?"

"Coffee," I told Fritz. "She must like something." He went. Wolfe had disappeared. "Sniff this," I told her, handing her the bottle, and went to the hall. The package was over by the rack, and her handbag was on the floor near the wall. I didn't know how it got there, and I still don't, but since I reject Wolfe's fundamental principle I assume that a fainting woman can hang onto something.

Returning to the patient I was just in time to keep her from rolling off the couch. She was trying to pull the cushions out from under her middle. When I put a hand on her shoulder she protested, "Pillows are for heads, Buster. Can't you tell my head from my fanny? Give me the bag."

I handed it to her and she turned onto her side, propping on her elbow, to open it. Apparently her concern was for a particular item, for after a brief glance inside she was closing it, but I said, "Here, put this in," and offered the package.

She didn't take it. "So I'm still alive," she said. "I'm froze stiff, but I'm alive. Don't Nero Wolfe believe in heat?"

"It's seventy in here," I told her. "When you faint your blood does something. Here's your package."

"Did you open it?"

"No."

"I knew you wouldn't. I'm still dizzy." Her head went back down. "You're such a detective, maybe you can tell me what he was going to do if he killed me. He would have had to stop the car and get out to get the bag. Wouldn't he?"

"I should think so. If it was the bag he wanted."

"Of course it was." She took a deep breath, and another. "He thought the package was in it.

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Anyhow, it was your fault I was there, what you said about the button. I've been intending to sew that button on for a month, and when you said to have one put on and charge it to you, that was too much. I hadn't done anything about my clothes on account of a man for twenty years, and here was a man offering to buy me a button. So I went home and sewed it on."

She stopped to breathe. I stuck the package in my pocket. "Where is home?" I asked.

"Forty-seventh Street. Between Eighth and Ninth. So that's why I was there, but you keep your head, Buster. Don't offer to buy me some hair dye. When I left I was going to take a Ninth Avenue bus to come back here, and walking along Forty-seventh Street the car came on the sidewalk behind me and hit me here." She touched her right hip. "Bumping up over the curb must have spoiled his aim. It didn't hit me hard enough to knock me down, so I must have stumbled when I jumped. Anyhow, I fell, and I must have rolled over more than once because I was walking near the curb and I came against a building. Is that Nero Wolfe?"

The door to the office had opened and Wolfe was there, scowling at us. I told her yes, and told him, "Miss Hattie Annis. She's telling me why she was late for her appointment. She went to her house on Forty-seventh Street, and coming back a car climbed the curb and hit her. I know there's no chair here big enough for you, but she ought to stay flat a little longer."

"I am capable of standing for two minutes," he said stiffly.

"You don't look it," Hattie said. "You would do fine for Falstaff."

"Finish it," I told her. "And the car went on?"

"It must have. When I got up it was gone. A man and a woman helped me up, and another man stopped, but nothing was broke and I could walk. So I walked. I didn't want to try climbing on a bus. I kept in close to the buildings, and I stopped to rest about every block, and the last two blocks I didn't think I would make it, but I did. How did you know I was there if I fainted?"

"You rang the bell. I caught you before you hit bottom."

"And you carried me in and I missed it. Carried by a man and didn't know it. What's life up to?"

Wolfe came in a step. "Madam. I told Mr. Goodwin I would give you two minutes."

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She had lifted her head and I had put a cushion under it. "I appreciate it," she said. "A wonderful day. Buster carries me in and Falstaff gives me two minutes—and here's another one with coffee!"

Fritz coming with the coffee eased the situation. To Wolfe anyone having food or drink in his house is a guest, and guests have to be humored, within reason. He couldn't tell me to bounce her while I was bringing a stand for the tray and Fritz was filling her cup. So he stood and scowled. When she had taken a sip he spoke.

"Mr. Goodwin said you have something that you think is good for a reward. What is it?"

She had sat up and taken off the woolen gloves. She took another sip. "That's good coffee," she said. "First I'll tell you how I got it. I own that house on Forty-seventh Street. I was born in it." Another sip. "Do you happen to know that all stage people are crazy?"

Wolfe grunted. "They have no monopoly."

"Maybe not, but theirs is a special kind. I'm not saying I like them but they give me a feeling. My father owned a theater. My house is only an eight-minute walk from Times Square, and I only need one room and a kitchen, so they can live there whether they can pay or not. Five of them are living there now—three men and two girls—and they use the kitchen. They're supposed to make their beds and keep their rooms decent, and some of them do. I never go in their rooms. My room is the second floor front—"

"If you please." Wolfe was curt. "To the point."

"I'll get there, Falstaff. Let the lady talk." She took a sip. "Good coffee. The ground floor front is the parlor. Nobody goes in there much since my mother died years ago, but once a week I go in and look around, and when I went in yesterday afternoon a mouse ran out from under the piano and went in back of the bookshelves. Do you believe a mouse could run up a woman's leg?"

"No." Wolfe was emphatic.

"Neither do I. I got my umbrella from the hall and poked behind the shelves, but he didn't come out. There's no back to the shelves, so if I took the books out I'd have him. The bottom shelf has a History of the Thirteen Colonies in ten volumes and a set of Macaulay with the backs coming off. I took them all out, but the mouse wasn't there. He must have moved while I was getting the umbrella. But in back of the books was a little package I had never seen before, and I opened

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it, and that's what I've got. If I took it to the cops, goodbye. We can split the reward three ways, you and me and Buster here."

"What's in it?"

Her head turned. "Open it, Buster."

I took it from my pocket, sat on a chair, untied the string, and unwrapped the paper. It was a stack of new twenty-dollar bills. I flipped through it at a corner and then at another corner. All twenties.

"Imagine handing that to the cops," Hattie said. "Of course he knew I had it and he tried to kill me."

Wolfe grunted. "How much, Archie?"

"About two inches thick. Two hundred and fifty to the inch. Ten thousand dollars, more or less."

"Madam. You say he tried to kill you. Who?"

"I don't know which one." She put her cup down and picked up the pot to pour. "It could be one of the girls, but I'd rather not. If he hadn't tried to kill me I would just as soon—"

The doorbell rang. After putting the lettuce and paper and string on the chair I went to the hall and took a look. It was a medium-sized round-shouldered stranger in a dark gray overcoat and a snap brim nearly down to his ears. Before opening the door I shut the one to the front room.

"Yes, sir?"

He took a leather fold from a pocket, flipped it open, and offered it. I took it. Treasury Department of the United States. Secret Service Division. Albert Leach. In the picture he had no hat on, but it was probably him. I handed it back.

"My name is Albert Leach," he said.

"Check," I said.

"I'd like to speak with Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Goodwin."

"Mr. Wolfe isn't available. I'm Goodwin."

"May I come in?"

It was a little ticklish. Of course I had smelled a rat the second I saw his credentials. The walls and doors on that floor were all soundproofed, but with Wolfe and Hattie in there together there was no telling, and I didn't want him inside. But it had started to snow and the stoop had no roof, and I certainly wanted to know what was on his mind.

I gave him room and he stepped in. "I'm sorry," I said, "but Mr. Wolfe is busy and I'm helping him with something, so if you'll tell me—"

"Certainly." He had removed his hat. His hair was going, but it would be a couple of years before he could be

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called bald. "I want to ask about a woman named Baxter. Tamiris Baxter or Tammy Baxter. Is she here?"

"No. Around twenty-five? Five feet four, light brown hair, hazel eyes, hundred and twenty pounds, fur coat and fuzzy turban?"

He nodded. "That fits her."

"She was here this morning. She came at twenty minutes past ten, uninvited and unexpected, and left at ten thirty."

"Has she been back?"

"No."

"Has she phoned?"

"No."

"Another woman named Annis, Hattie Annis. Has she been here?"

I cocked my head. "You know, Mr. Leach, I don't mind being polite, but what the hell. Mr. Wolfe is a licensed private detective and so am I, and we don't answer miscellaneous questions just to pass the time. I've heard of Hattie Annis because Miss Baxter asked if she had been here, and I told her no. She asked me to phone her if she came, but I probably won't. What if this Hattie Annis comes and hires Mr. Wolfe to do a job? She might not want anyone to know she had been here. So skip it."

"I'm an officer of the law, Goodwin. I'm an agent of the United States government."

"So you are. And?"

"I want to know if Hattie Annis has been here today."

"Ask her. Miss Baxter gave me the phone number. Do you want it?"

"I have it." He put his hat on. "I know your reputation, Goodwin, and Wolfe's. You may get away with fancy tricks with the New York Police Department, but I advise you not to try any with the Secret Service." He turned and went, leaving the door open.

I shut the door and then went to the office. I got the best magnifying glass from a drawer of Wolfe's desk and a new twenty-dollar bill from the safe, and proceeded to the front room. Wolfe was still standing, scowling down at her, and she was talking. She broke off as I entered and turned to me. "You're just in time, Buster. He's trying to tell me there may be no reward, and I never heard of—what are you doing?"

I had picked up the stack of bills and was going to a window. Putting the one on top side by side with the one I had taken from the safe, one minute with the glass settled it. I took the one from the bottom of the stack and one from the middle, and used the glass on them. The same. I stuck the good one in my pocket and crossed to them.

"There'll probably be an

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award," I told her. "Official. They're phonies. Counterfeit."

I told a friend of mine about this incident one day a few weeks later, and when I got this far I asked her to guess what Hattie's reaction had been. "That's easy," my friend said. "She accused you of taking good bills from the package and substituting bad ones. You should have known she would."

My friend couldn't have been more wrong, but I admit it was my fault. I hadn't drawn Hattie true to life. What Hattie actually said was, "Of course they're counterfeit. Why would he hide real money in my parlor? And why would I bring it to Nero Wolfe?"

"You knew they were phonies?" I demanded.

"I knew they must be."

"You didn't mention it."

"Why should I? To you two great detectives? You knew it too or you wouldn't have examined them with a magnifying glass."

I shook my head. "I didn't know it, I only suspected it. I suspected it when I answered the bell just now and found a T-man at the door. A T-man is a Secret Service agent of the Treasury Department. He wanted to know if a woman named Tamiris Baxter was here. I told him no, that she was here this morning for ten minutes and left her—"

"Tammy Baxter? Tammy was here?"

"Right. She wanted to know if you had been here and I told her no. She left her phone number and asked me to ring her if you came. Then the T-man asked if Hattie Annis had been here, and I told him I was against answering miscellaneous questions, which is true, but the thing was, I had got curious about this stack of bills and wanted to take a look. So he left and I came and looked. Now you say you knew they were counterfeit."

"Archie." Wolfe was gruff. "You saw that man's credentials?"

"Of course."

"He asked for Miss Annis?"

"He asked if she had been here."

"Why didn't you bring him in?"

"Because I wanted to look at the bills. If they were okay I saw no reason to let a T-man disturb a guest of yours who appreciates Fritz's coffee."

The trouble was, she had finished the coffee. "Very well," he said, "you have looked at them. Does the Secret Service have a New York office?"

"Yes." A list of the things any two-bit dick knows and he

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doesn't would fill a book.

"Call them and report. If Miss Annis leaves before they arrive, keep the bills, and of course they will want the wrapping paper. Give her a receipt if she wants one." He turned and made for the office, shutting the door.

It didn't stay shut long. I admit I could have stopped her, by taking a step and stretching an arm, but I thought he might at least have given her a chance to thank him for the coffee. So I didn't take the step until she had the door open, and then went only to the sill. Wolfe was in his chair behind his desk before he knew she was there.

"Did you mean that?" she demanded. "Call the cops and hand it over?"

"Not the cops, madam." He was sharp. "The Secret Service. I have a responsibility as a citizen. Counterfeit money is contraband. I can't let you walk out of my house with it."

She put a hand on the desk edge for a prop. "Bootlicker," she said. "The great detective Nero Wolfe just a flunky for the cops. If Falstaff was here I'd apologize to him. Maybe he wasn't much of a hero, but he was no toady. You can't glare me down, the lady's going to talk. I found that stuff in my house, and I thought, I'd rather just burn it than turn it over to the cops. I thought the thing to do was find out who put it there and then go to a newspaper. Finding a counterfeiter ought to call for a reward.

"But I didn't know how to find out because my mind doesn't work like that, so I thought I would get a detective and split the reward with him, and I might as well get the best, so I go to Nero Wolfe, and this is what happens. Counterfeit money may be contraband, but it's not your counterfeit money, it's mine. I found it in my house, but what do you care, you want to suck up to the cops, so you tell him to call them and report, and keep the bills, and swaggle out. I spit at you. I don't spit, but I spit at you." She about-faced. "You too, Buster? Is this what you carried me in for?"

"Madam," Wolfe said.

She whirled back. "Don't madam me!"

"You have a point," Wolfe said. "I reject your charge of servility, but you have a point, and an interesting one. I am not an officer of the law. Has a private citizen the right to confiscate contraband? I doubt it. Even if he has the right, is it a duty? Surely not. That counterfeit money is yours until it is seized by public authority. I confess to error, but I was prompted by

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expedience, not sycophancy. I merely wanted to get clear of a muddle. Now, confound it, you have raised a point I can't ignore, but neither can I ignore my obligation as a citizen.

"I offer a suggestion: Mr. Goodwin will put the bills in my safe and go with you to your house and investigate. You say you wanted to engage me to identify and expose the counterfeiter; he will decide if that is feasible without prolonged and expensive inquiry. If it isn't I'll return your property to you, but I shall notify the Secret Service that I am doing so. In either case I shall expect no fee. You are not my client. I am merely wriggling out of a muddle. Well?"

"We split the reward three ways," she said.

"I have no interest in a reward." He flipped a hand, discarding it. "There probably won't be any."

"There had better be. I don't need it. I've got enough to go on and then some, but I've never earned any money and this is my chance. Keeping it in your safe, that's all right. I'm not going to apologize for what I said until I see what happens."

"I wouldn't expect you to. Archie?"

I moved. The bills were still in my hand, but the wrapping paper and string were on the chair. I went and brought them, holding the paper by a corner. "A question," I said. "Since he hid it where it might possibly be found he might have had sense enough not to leave prints, but he might not. If not, I've got him right here. I can find out in ten minutes, but it would be tampering with evidence, and the question is, do I?"

"Of course," Hattie said. "I thought of that but I didn't know how."

"You can't test it without leaving traces," Wolfe said.

"No."

"Then don't. That can wait."

Of course my prints were already there, on both the bills and the paper, but there was no point in adding more, so I took care putting them in the safe. I asked Wolfe if he had any instructions, and when he said no, I knew what the situation required.

I got Hattie's bag and gloves from the front room; she hadn't taken her coat off. I thought I might as well try her pulse, but she wouldn't let me. When I showed her to the lavatory to look in the mirror she had to admit her face could stand some attention, and when she came out the smudge was gone and she had even tucked her hair in some.

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Walking to Tenth Avenue for a taxi she limped a little, but she said it was nothing, just that her hip had a sore spot. When we were stopped by a red light at 38th Street the sight of a harness bull on the sidewalk prompted her to explain why she was so down on him and his. I got it that her father had been shot by one without provocation, but she seemed a little hazy about the details, and I was more interested in something else: what did she know of Tammy Baxter? She must be involved somehow, since the T-man wanted her.

Hattie said no, it couldn't be Tammy, because she only had one suit, two dresses, three blouses, and two skirts, and her fur coat was rabbit, and if she were a counterfeiter she would have more clothes. I conceded that that was pretty decisive, but why was the T-man interested in her? How long had she been living in Hattie's house? Three weeks. What did Hattie know of her background and history? Nothing. Hattie never asked for references. When someone came and wanted a place to sleep she just sized him up. Or her.

The other four current roomers had all been there longer—one of them, Raymond Dell, more than three years. In the thirties Dell had always had enough work to lunch at Sardi's twice a week, and in the forties he had done fairly well in Hollywood; but now he was down to a few TV crumbs.

Noel Ferris, a year and a half. A year ago he had been in a play which had folded in four days, and this season in one which had lasted two weeks.

Paul Hannah, four months. A kid in his early twenties with no Broadway record. He was rehearsing in a show that was to open next month at an off-Broadway theater, the Mushroom.

Martha Kirk, eleven months. Twenty years old. Was in *Short and Sweet* for a year. Now studying at the Eastern Ballet Studio.

That was what I had got when the taxi rolled to the curb in 47th Street. Tammy Baxter had said the house was a dump, and it was, like hundreds of others in that part of town. The wind whirled some snow into the vestibule when I pushed the door open. Hattie used her key on the inner door and we entered. I had told her that I would first take a look at the bookshelf, to see if the dust situation could furnish any information as to how long the package had been there, but as we were taking off our coats in the hall a voice came booming down the stairs.

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"Is that you, Hattie?"

The owner of the voice was following it down. He was a tall thin guy with a marvelous mane of wavy white hair, in an ancient blue dressing gown with spots on it. He was rumbling, "Where on earth have you been, or above it or beneath? Without you this house is a sepulcher! There are no oranges." He noticed me. "How do you do, sir."

"Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Dell," Hattie said. I started to offer a hand, but he was bowing, so I bowed instead. A voice sounded behind me. "This way for oranges, Ray! I got some. Good morning, Hattie—I mean good afternoon."

Raymond Dell headed for the rear of the hall, where a girl was standing in a doorway, and when Hattie followed him I tagged along, on into the kitchen. On a big linoleum-topped table in the center a large brass bowl was piled high with oranges, and by the time I entered Dell had taken one and started to peel it. There was a smell of coffee.

"Miss Kirk, Mr. Goodwin," Hattie said.

Martha Kirk barely looked her twenty. She was ornamental both above the neck and below, with matching dimples. She gave me a glance and a nod, and asked Hattie, "Do you know where Tammy is? Two phone calls. A man, no name."

Hattie said she didn't know. Dell looked up from his orange to rumble at me, "You're a civilian, Mr. Goodwin?"

It was a well-put question, since if I wasn't in show business my reply would show whether I was close enough to it to know that stage people call outsiders civilians. But Hattie replied for me.

"You watch your tongue with Mr. Goodwin," she told him. "He thinks he's going to do a piece for a magazine about me and my house, and that's why he's here. We're all going to be famous. There'll be a picture of us with Carol Jasper. She lived here nearly a year."

"What magazine?" Dell demanded. Martha Kirk skipped around the table to curtsy to me. "What would you like?" she asked. "An omelet of larks' eggs? With truffles?"

I was a little sorry I had suggested that explanation of me to Hattie. It would be a shame to disappoint a girl who could curtsy like that. "You'd better save it," I said. "This egg not only hasn't hatched, it's not even laid yet."

Raymond Dell was boring holes through me with deep-set blue-gray eyes. "I wouldn't have my picture taken with Carol Jasper," he said, "for all

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the gold of Ormus and of Ind."

"You can squat down behind," Hattie said. "Come on, Mr. Goodwin." She moved. "He wants to see the house. I hope the beds are made."

I said I'd see them later and followed her out. Halfway down the hall she asked, not lowering her voice, "How was that? All right?"

"Fine," I said, loud enough to carry back. "They're interested and that'll help."

She stopped at a door on the left toward the front, opened it, and went in. I followed and closed the door. The window blinds were down and it was almost as dark as night, but she slipped a wall switch and light came from a cluster of bulbs in the ceiling. I glanced around. A sofa, dark red plush or velvet, chairs to match; a fireplace with a marble mantel; worn and faded carpet; an upright piano against the wall on the right, and, beyond the piano, shelves of books.

"Here," Hattie said, and went to the shelves. "I put the books back like they were." As I moved to join her the corner of my eye caught something, and I turned my head; and, seeing it, I turned more and then froze. It was Tammy Baxter, flat on the floor behind the sofa, staring up at the ceiling; and, as if to show her where to stare, the handle of a knife at right angles to her chest was pointing straight at the cluster of lights.

To show you how freaky a human mind can be, as if you didn't already know, the thought that popped into mine was that Hattie had been right: a counterfeiter would have more clothes; and what brought it was the fact that Tammy's skirt was up nearly to her waist, exposing her legs. That took the first tenth of a second. The next thought was also of Hattie, just as freaky but for men only, based on the strictly male notion that women aren't tough enough to take the sight of a corpse. I turned, and she was there at my elbow, staring down at it.

"That's a knife," she said.

That plain statement of fact brought my mind to. I went and squatted, lifted Tammy's hand, and pressed hard on the thumbnail. When I released the pressure it stayed white. The dead hand flopped back to the carpet and I stood up. I glanced at my wrist: twelve minutes past one. "You'll see the cops now," I said. "If you don't want— Hands off! Don't touch her!"

"I won't," she said, and didn't. She only touched the skirt, the hem, to pull it down,

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but it was bunched underneath and would come only to the knees.

"It's your house," I said, "so you ought to phone, but I will if you prefer."

"Phone for a cop?"

"Yes."

"Do you have to?"

"Certainly."

She went to a chair and sat. "This is the way it goes," she said. "It always has. When I want to think I can't. But you can, Buster, that's your business. You ought to be able to think of something better than calling a cop."

"I'm afraid I can't, Hattie." I stopped. I hadn't realized she had become Hattie to me until I heard it come out. I went on, "But first a couple of questions, in case some thinking is called for later. When you came back here this morning to sew on the button, did you see Tammy?"

"No."

"Did you see anybody?"

"No."

"The car that came up on the sidewalk and hit you. Did you see the driver?"

"No, how could I? It came from behind."

"The man and woman who helped you up, and the other man. Did they see the driver?"

"No, I asked them. They said they didn't. I can't think about that, I'm thinking about this. We'll go up to my room. Ray and Martha don't know we came in here. We'll go up to my room and you'll think of something."

"I can't think her alive and I can't think her body somewhere else. If you mean we forget we came in and saw it, then what? You said nobody comes in here much. Do you phone or do I?"

Her mouth worked. "You're no good, Buster. I wish I hadn't sewed that button on." She got to her feet, none too steady. "I'm going upstairs, and I'm not going to see any cops."

She moved, but not toward the door. She stood and looked down at the corpse, and said, "It's not your fault, Tammy. Your name won't ever be on a marquee now." She moved again, stopped at the door to say, "The phone's in the hall," and went.

I looked around. There was no sign of a struggle. There was nothing to be seen that might not have belonged to the room—Tammy's handbag, for instance. I went and squatted by her for a look at the knife handle; it was plain black wood, four inches long, the kind for a large kitchen knife. It was clear in to the handle and there was no blood.

I got erect and went to the hall, where I had noticed the

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phone on a stand under the stairs. Voices were coming from the kitchen. That it wasn't a coin phone, out in the open in that house, was worthy of remark; either Hattie's roomers could be trusted not to take liberties, or she could afford not to care if they did. Only now, evidently, one of them had taken the liberty of sticking a knife in Tammy Baxter. I dialed the number I knew best.

"Yes?"

I have tried to persuade Wolfe that is no way to answer the phone, with no success. "Me," I said. "Calling from Miss Annis' house to report a complication. We went in the parlor to look at the bookshelf and found Tammy Baxter on the floor with a knife in her chest. The girl that came this morning to ask if Miss Annis had been there and that the T-man asked about. Miss Annis won't call the police, so I have to. I am keeping my voice low because this phone is in the hall and there are people in the kitchen with the door open. I have my eye on it. I need instructions. You told Miss Annis you would return her property to her, and you like to do what you say you'll do. So when I answer questions what do I save?"

"Again," he growled.

"Again what?"

"Again you. Your talent for dancing merrily into a bog is extraordinary. Why the deuce should you save anything? Save for what?"

"I'm not dancing and I'm not merry. You sent me here. In one minute, possibly two, it would occur to you as it has to me that it would be a nuisance to have to explain why we postponed reporting that counterfeit money. I could omit the detail that I inspected it and found it was counterfeit. If and when the question is put I could deny it."

"Pfui. That woman."

"It would be two against one, if it came to that, but I don't think it will. She says she's not going to see any cops and has gone to her room. Of course she'll see them, or they'll see her, but I doubt if they'll hear much. Her attitude toward cops is drastic. One will get you ten that she won't even tell them where she went this morning. But if you would prefer to open the bag—"

"I would prefer to obliterate the entire episode. Confound it. Very well. Omit that detail."

"Right. I'll be home when I get there."

I cradled the phone and stood and frowned at it. A citizen finding a dead body is supposed to report it at once, and in addition to being a

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citizen I was a licensed private detective; but another five minutes wouldn't hang me. Raymond Dell's boom was still coming from the kitchen. Hattie had said her room was the second floor front. I went to the stairs, mounted a flight, turned right in the upper hall, and tapped on a door.

Her voice came. "Who is it?"

"Goodwin. Buster to you."

"What do you want? Are you alone?"

"I'm alone and I want to ask you something."

The sound of footsteps, then of a sliding bolt that needed oiling, and the door opened. I entered and she closed the door and bolted it. "They haven't come yet," I said. "I phoned Mr. Wolfe to suggest that it would simplify matters if we leave out one item, that we knew the bills were counterfeit. Including you. That hadn't occurred to us. If you admit you knew or suspected they were phony, it will be a lot more unpleasant. So I thought I'd—"

"Who would I admit it to?"

"The cops. Naturally."

"I'm not going to admit anything to the cops. I'm not going to see any cops."

"Good for you." There was no point in telling her how wrong she was. "If you change your mind, remember that we didn't know the money was counterfeit. I'm sorry I'm no good."

I went, shutting the door, and as I headed for the stairs I heard the bolt slide home. In the lower hall voices still came from the kitchen. I went to the phone, dialed Watkins 9-8241, got it, gave my name, asked for Sergeant Stebbins, and after a short wait had him.

"Goodwin? I'm busy."

"You're going to be busier. I thought it would save time to bypass headquarters. I'm calling from the house of Miss Hattie Annis, Six-twenty-eight West Forty-seventh Street. There's a dead body here in the parlor—a woman with a knife in her chest. DOA—that is, *my* arrival. I'm leaving to get a bite of lunch."

"You are like hell. You again. I needed this. This was all I needed." He pronounced a word which it is a misdemeanor to use on the telephone. "You're staying there, and you're keeping your hands off. Of course you discovered it."

"Not of course. Just I discovered it."

He pronounced another contraband word. "Repeat that address."

I repeated it. The connection went. As I hung up, a notion struck me. Hattie wasn't there to call me a bootlicker and

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flunky and toady, and it wouldn't hurt to be polite; and besides, it would be interesting and instructive to see how Stebbins would react to outside authority sticking a finger in his pie. So I got the phone book from the stand, found the number, and dialed it.

A man's voice answered. "Rector two, nine one hundred."

Being discreet. Liking it plain, I asked, "Secret Service Division?"

"Yes."

"I would like to speak to Mr. Albert Leach."

"Mr. Leach isn't in at the moment. Who is this, please?"

My reply was delayed because my attention was diverted. The front door had opened and a man had entered; and hearing my voice he had approached for a look. I looked back. He was young and handsome—Broadway handsome. The phone repeated, "Who is this, please?"

"My name is Archie Goodwin. I have a message for Mr. Leach. He asked me this morning about a woman named Tammy Baxter. Tell him that Miss Baxter is dead. Murdered. Her body was discovered in the parlor of the house where she lived on Forty-seventh Street. I have just notified the police. I thought Mr. Leach—"

I dropped the phone on the cradle, moved, and called, "Hey, you! Hold it!"

The handsome young man, halfway to the parlor door, stopped and wheeled; and at the rear of the hall there were steps and Martha Kirk's voice, and she came trotting, the trot of a dancer, with Raymond Dell striding at her heels. As I crossed the hall a buzzer sounded in the kitchen, and I went and opened the door. It was two harness bulls. They stepped in and the one in front spoke. "Are you Archie Goodwin?"

"I am." I pointed to the parlor door. "In there."

Two hours later, at twenty minutes to four, as I sat at the big table in the kitchen eating crackers and cheese and raspberry preserves, and drinking coffee, Inspector Cramer of Homicide West sent for me to ask me a favor. Very few people or situations had ever got Cramer to the point of asking a favor of me, but Hattie Annis had managed it.

With me at the table were two of the roomers, Noel Ferris and Paul Hannah. Ferris was the handsome young man who had appeared as I was phoning. Hannah was even younger, but not as handsome. He had chubby pink cheeks and not

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enough nose, and his ears stuck out. A dick had gone for him at the Mushroom Theater, where he had been rehearsing. At the moment Cramer sent for me he and Ferris were discussing the question, when had they last been in the parlor? Ferris said one evening about a month ago, when he had gone in to see if the piano was as bad as Martha said it was, and had found it was worse. Hannah said two weeks ago yesterday, when he had come downstairs to make a phone call and Martha was at the phone talking, and he had stepped into the parlor because he didn't want to stand there and listen.

Before they had got onto that they had argued about the knife. Hannah said he had identified it as one from a kitchen drawer which he had often used, and Ferris said he shouldn't have identified it; he should have merely said it was similar. They had got fairly heated, paying no attention to a city employee who was on a chair by the door, taking it in.

I hadn't been allowed in the parlor, but I had seen the experts come and go, and some of them were still there. My first interview had been with Purley Stebbins, who had arrived in person only ten minutes behind the pair from the prowl car. That had taken place in the kitchen. My second interview had been in the room above the kitchen, Raymond Dell's room as I learned later, with Inspector Cramer and the T-man, Albert Leach. That was an honor, but I felt that I rated it because if it hadn't been for me they wouldn't have been there. My phone call to the Secret Service had brought Leach on the jump, and Leach's appearance had brought the Inspector. No doubt about it. So it was Cramer, not Stebbins, that I got to see reacting to outside authority, and it wasn't very instructive because he was mostly reacting to me as usual.

"You say Wolfe told her he would expect no fee and he wasn't interested in a reward, but he sent you here with her and you paid the cab fare. Nuts. I know Wolfe and I know you. You expect me to swallow that?"

Or: "You try to tell me that you don't know exactly how long it was after you found the body until you called Stebbins because you didn't look at your watch when you found the body. That's a lie. The way you've been trained, looking at your watch would have been automatic. Raymond Dell and Martha Kirk say it was just a few minutes after one when you and Hattie Annis left the kitchen. You called Stebbins at

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one thirty-four. Half an hour. What were you doing?"

Or: "Quit your clowning!"

Of course he was at a disadvantage, since at the beginning he expected to be riled, and when he's riled his mind skips. So I got no bruises, and the one ticklish point was never mentioned. I gave him all the facts about the package from the time Hattie left it with me until I put it in the safe, excepting one detail, and he didn't even hint at the possibility that it might be queer, and neither did Leach. Leach horned in only once, when he got riled too.

"I warned you," he said, "not to try any fancy tricks with the Secret Service. And at that moment, when I was asking you if Hattie Annis had been there, she was in with Wolfe. You have just admitted it. You withheld information required by an agent of the Federal government in the performance of his duty, and you will answer for it."

"I'll answer now," I told him. "Why should I tell you anything about anybody? If you had any proper ground for asking me about Hattie Annis you didn't mention it. Inspector Cramer doesn't have to mention it. She and I found a dead body in her house, and it's his job to catch murderers, and it's possible that there is a connection between the murder and the package that Miss Annis found and brought to Mr. Wolfe. So I answer his questions. I can't think offhand of any question whatever that I owe you an answer to. Do you want to try?"

That was deliberate. Sooner or later someone was going to ask me if I knew that money was counterfeit, and I might as well get it over with and have it on the record. But he merely looked at Cramer, and Cramer resumed.

At twenty minutes to four, when a dick named Callahan entered the kitchen and said the Inspector wanted me, I supposed it had been decided that it was time to try me on the ten-thousand-dollar question, but when I saw Cramer's face I knew that wasn't it. Instead of being set to blurt a tough one at me he was chewing on a cigar, and he does that only when he doesn't like the prospect. Lieutenant Rowcliff and another dick were with him, in Dell's room. Leach wasn't there. It didn't come easy for him. He took the cigar from his mouth, put it back, and rasped, "We need your help, Goodwin."

"I'd love to help," I said.

"Yeah." Not at all the right tone for asking a favor. "Did

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you tell that Annis woman to bolt herself in?"

"No. I have reported it as it happened."

"Yeah." He removed the cigar. "She won't open the door. She won't open her trap. We don't want to smash the door unless we have to. She's your client and if you tell her to slide that damn bolt she will."

"She is not my client. Nor Mr. Wolfe's."

"So you say. Wouldn't she open the door if you asked her to?"

"Probably."

"Okay. Ask her."

I allowed a grin to show. "Not the way you mean. Not with you at my elbow. I'm willing to try if I'm alone in the hall and the door of this room is shut, and I'll explain the situation to her. She has a personal attitude to cops. A cop shot her father."

"Yeah, fifteen years ago. Hasn't she got any sense?"

"No."

"She might know we'll bust the door if we have to. Will you tell her that?"

"Sure. With conditions as specified. You and yours stay here with the door shut. Rowcliff is slow in the skull but his feet are fast."

"Save the gags," Cramer growled, and stuck the cigar in his mouth. I went, closed the door behind me, walked down the hall, rapped on Hattie's door, and called, "It's me. Buster Goodwin. I'm alone. Let me in. I want to ask you something."

Footsteps and then her voice. "Where are they?"

"Still in the house but at a safe distance. I am not a flunky."

The bolt grated and the door opened. I entered, shut the door, and slid the bolt. The blinds were down and the lights were on. She had a magazine in her hand. "You might have brought me something to eat," she said. "I haven't had any lunch. You're no good."

I faced her. "That's the second time you've told me I'm no good," I said. "Let's get that settled. If you really mean it why did you let me in?"

"I thought you had something to eat. When I say you're no good that's just for then, when I say it. I'm hungry."

"Okay. Actually I'm extremely good. If I wasn't, why would I bother to come and tell you to stay away from the door because they're going to bust it in?"

"No, they won't."

"Why won't they?"

"Because they know if they do I'll shoot."

I glanced around. A massive

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old walnut bed, a big old rolltop desk, dresser, chest of drawers, chairs, pictures of men and women all over the walls, actors from a mile off. "What will you shoot with?" I asked.

"Nothing," she said. "I haven't got a gun, but they don't know it."

I eyed her. "May I have permission to call you Hattie?"

"No. Not until I see what happens."

"Very well, Miss Annis. A cop named Cramer, an inspector, asked me to come and tell you they're going to break in. They can do that without getting in the line of fire, and they will. That's all he asked me to tell you, but I add this on my own, that if they have to smash the door to get to you it's an absolute certainty that they'll take you downtown, and they'll probably hold you as a material witness. They're investigating a murder that occurred in your house, and you're a suspect. Whereas if you let them in and answer the questions they have a right to ask, they probably won't take you downtown and you can sleep in your own bed."

She was staring at me. "You say I'm a suspect?"

"Certainly. When you came home to sew on the button, it could have been then."

"*You* suspect me?"

"Of course not. Even if I'm no good I'm not a halfwit."

Her lips tightened. "They'll have to carry me."

"They can. There's enough of them, and they have handcuffs."

"They'll need them." She cocked her head. A strand of gray hair fell across her eye, and she didn't bother to brush it back. "All right, Buster. I've never hired a detective. Do you want me to sign something?"

"Whom are you hiring, Miss Annis?"

"I'm hiring you. Call me Hattie."

"You can't hire me. I work for Nero Wolfe on salary."

"Then I'm hiring Nero Wolfe."

"To do what?"

"To show the cops. To make them wish they had never set foot in my house. To make them eat dirt."

"He wouldn't take the job. You might hire him to investigate the murder, and he might fill your order as a by-product. But he has exaggerated ideas about fees, and I doubt if you could afford it."

"Would you help him?"

"Of course. That's my job."

She shut her eyes, tight. In a moment she opened them. "I could pay him one-tenth of all I've got besides the house. I could pay him forty-two

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thousand dollars. That ought to be enough."

It took a little effort not to gawk. "I should think so," I conceded. "If you want me to put it to him I have to ask a question that he'll ask. He's very realistic about money. What you've got besides the house, is it in something convenient? Would you have to sell something—for instance, a race horse or a yacht?"

"Don't try to be funny, Buster. I'm realistic about money too. It's in tax-exempt bonds in a vault in a bank. Do you want me to sign something?"

"That's not necessary, now that I call you Hattie." I controlled an impulse to reach and brush the strand of hair away from her eye. "You may not be very available the rest of the day, so we'll leave it this way: you have hired Mr. Wolfe to investigate the murder, and if he doesn't take the job I'll notify you as soon as I can get in touch with you. And you'll leave—"

"Why wouldn't he take the job?"

"Because he's a genius and he's eccentric. Geniuses don't have to have reasons. But leave that to me. And if you're going to pay us I might as well start earning it. Have you got a stamp pad?"

She said yes, in the desk, and I went and found it in a pigeonhole. She said she had no glossy paper, and I took her magazine and found a page ad in color with wide margins in white, and tore it out. "I'll want all ten fingers," I told her. "First your right hand, the thumb. Like this."

She didn't ask why. She didn't ask anything. Either she knew why or she merely wanted to humor me, and your guess is as good as mine. When I had the set, the right hand on the right margin and the left on the left, I folded the sheet with care and put it between the pages of my notebook.

"Okay," I said. "You'll leave the door unbolted, and I'll tell Cramer—"

"No, I won't. If they break in that door they'll pay for it."

I explained again. I told her that anyone as realistic about money as she was ought to be able to be realistic about murder; but she wouldn't budge. I told her she didn't have to invite them in or let them in, just leave the door unbolted, and she said I was no good. So I left, and the second I was across the sill, the door clicked shut and I heard the bolt go in. I walked to the rear and opened the door of Dell's room.

"Well?" Cramer demanded.

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"No soap." I stood in the doorway. "If she has a brain I can't imagine what she uses it for. She wants to hire Nero Wolfe to make you eat dirt. I told her if you had to break in you would probably take her downtown and hold her, and she said you'd have to carry her. When I left she pushed the bolt."

"All right," Cramer said, "if that's the way she wants it." He turned to speak to Rowcliff, but I didn't stay to listen, because I had an urgent errand. Callahan, the dick who had brought me from the kitchen, wasn't in sight, and if I went downstairs unescorted I probably wouldn't be stopped. I backed off, made the landing, descended, asked the dick in the lower hall if it was still snowing as I got my hat and coat, took my time putting my coat on, opened the front door, and was gone.

The snow was coming down thicker and was an inch deep on the sidewalk. Outside were two harness bulls, four police cars double parked, and a small group of unofficial criminologists. I headed east, found a phone booth in a bar and grill around the corner on Eighth Avenue, and dialed. It was after four and Wolfe would be up in the plant rooms for his afternoon session with the orchids, which is from four to six; so it was Fritz who answered, and I told him to switch it.

"Yes?" Wolfe is always gruff on the phone, but when it interrupts him up there he is even gruffer.

"Me again. From a booth on Eighth Avenue. I left the scene informally because I have something to report. We won't be contradicted about the money. Miss Annis, whom I now call Hattie, has buttoned her lip and will keep it buttoned. She is in her room with the door bolted and Cramer and Rowcliff are going to batter their way in. Stebbins isn't around. I was re—"

"He was here."

"Who? Stebbins?"

"Yes. I spoke with him at the door. He wanted the package of money. I told him it was not mine to surrender, since it had been left in your safekeeping. He said nothing about its being bogus. I didn't admit him. He was not pleased."

"I'll bet. I was requested by Cramer to persuade Hattie to let him in, and I tried—not through the door, she let me in. When I told her that if they had to bust the door to get to her they would take her downtown and hold her, she said she wanted to hire you to make

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them eat dirt. I said the only job you might take would be to investigate the murder, and dirt-eating, if any, would be a by-product, and your fee would be high. She said she could pay you twenty-one thousand dollars, one-tenth of the tax-exempt bonds she has in a bank vault. I said we would leave it that you are hired, and if you refuse to take it on because you're eccentric I'll notify her. The trouble is, how can I notify her if she's not accessible? Shall I ask Cramer to tell her you're too busy?"

"Yes."

"Naturally," I said sympathetically. "You would rather starve than work if only you had no appetite. The fact is, she wanted to hire me and I told her to get me she had to hire you. I'll hold the wire while you count ten."

"Confound you." It was a growl from the depths. "She may have no bonds. She is probably indigent."

"Not a chance. She's my favorite screwball, but she's not a liar. I'm under her spell and I'm in her debt. She made Cramer ask me a favor."

Silence. Then, more growl. "Come home and report. We'll see."

One of the rules in that house is no business talk at meals, ever, and another is no business in the plant rooms except in emergencies. That winter day the emergency was not that some sudden development demanded immediate action or that an important case had reached a crisis; it was that Wolfe had to decide, to work or not to work, and he could get no pleasure fiddling with orchids with that hanging over him. He took my report not in one of the three plant rooms, with their dazzle of color, but in the potting room, perched on his made-to-order stool at the big bench. Theodore was washing pots at the sink, and I used his stool.

Wolfe keeps his eyes closed when I am reporting and rarely interrupts with questions. When I finished he took in air clear down to his middle, let it out, opened his eyes, and grunted, "Any comments or suggestions?"

"Yes, sir, plenty. First, Hattie Annis is out. She couldn't possibly have been faking it when we went in and found the body. I wouldn't try to predict what she's going to do, but I know what she didn't do. She didn't kill Tammy Baxter. Second, their not asking if I knew the money is counterfeit is an insult to my intelligence and yours too. Leach had told Cramer not to

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mention it because what he wants is to find the source. He'd rather catch a counterfeiter than a murderer any day, and if counterfeiting was mentioned to me I might mention it to a reporter. Evidently he thinks we can't add two and two. A T-man coming to ask me about a woman who had left a package of bills with me, and the idea that they might be counterfeit wouldn't occur to me?"

"He didn't know she had been here and left a package."

"He did when I was being questioned. He heard me tell Cramer. Cramer must have been biting nails. He'd love to get us for being in possession of a stack of the queer. Ten to one Leach didn't know he sent Stebbins here to get it. Third, Tammy Baxter was a T-woman."

Wolfe made a face. "That mean something?"

"It does now. If there are T-men, there can be a T-woman, though I've never heard of one. This morning Leach asked if she was here, and when I told him she had been and gone he asked if she had been back or phoned and then switched to Hattie Annis. Why didn't he ask what Tammy Baxter had said? Because he knew; she had reported to him. Also he knew the phone number of that house. Also Cramer. Why wasn't he more interested in my talk with Tammy Baxter only an hour or so before she was murdered? Because he already knew about it from Leach."

"Then she had been posted in that house by the Secret Service?"

"Sure. A good guess is that they knew someone who lived there had passed bad money. I doubt if they knew which one, because if so they know who killed Tammy Baxter, and I don't think they would dare not to tell Cramer—but it's possible. Their big play isn't for the passers, it's for the plant. Fourth, one of the four roomers is it, on account of the knife. It came from that kitchen. Raymond Dell, Noel Ferris, Paul Hannah, Martha Kirk. If one or more of them have been crossed off by alibis that would narrow it. Fifth, if Hattie Annis is your client you probably want to speak to Parker, since you are against leaving a client in the coop. I'll ring him."

"I haven't told you to."

"Do you tell me not to?"

He tightened his lips. He took a deep breath. "Confound you. Call him."

"Right. But first one more. Sixth, I see no reason why I shouldn't try the package for

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prints, since it hasn't occurred to us that the bills may be phony. I'm assuming that you don't intend to let loose of your client's property unless a court orders you to."

"Certainly not. But there will be other prints than yours. Hers."

"I've got hers."

"You have."

"Yes, sir. In case."

"So." He got off the stool. "So you make the decisions. Let me know if you wish to confer. Go."

I went. It isn't easy to pass down the aisles of those three rooms without stopping, even in an emergency, but that time I stopped only once, where a group of Miltonia roezlis were sporting more than fifty racemes on four feet of bench. It was the best crop of Miltonias that Wolfe (and Theodore) had ever had. The display is always harder to believe when snow is dancing on the sloping glass overhead.

Since it was after office hours I dialed the home number of Nathaniel Parker, the lawyer, got him, put him through to Wolfe, and listened in, as I am supposed to when not told to get off. He was a little doubtful about springing our client before morning, since they had had to smash a door to get to her and she wasn't talking, but he said he would get on it immediately and do his best. That done, I went to the safe and got the wrapping paper and bills.

It was a two-hour job, and I took an hour out for dinner, so it was after nine o'clock when I finished. It took so long because (a) wrapping paper is a mean surface to lift prints from, (b) I had to check and double check every print with Hattie's and mine, and (c) I had to be darned careful to leave the evidence intact if there was any there.

During the last hour, after dinner, Wolfe was there at his desk in the only chair he really likes, reading his current book. Now and then he shot me a glance, of course hoping that I would announce that we had him, and his job would be simple. But at a quarter past nine I swiveled and spoke. "No. Positively. Seven good prints, twelve fair ones, and fourteen smudges. The only ones that can be identified are Hattie's and mine. Either he never handled it without gloves or he wiped it."

I'll say this for him: he never asks silly questions like Are you sure, or Have you tried the bills too. He merely growled, "It was too much to expect." He picked up his bookmark, a thin strip of gold

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that had been given him by a client in spite of the size of his bill, inserted it, and put the book down. "What do you suggest?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, I took the bills and wrapping paper, still handling them with care, went to the safe, and put them in. "Now," I said, returning, "it will take a brain, and you know where one is. I only run errands. I know you never leave the house on business, but if you—"

The doorbell rang. I offered myself three to one that it was Cramer, probably with Leach for company, stepped to the hall, and flipped the switch for the stoop light. It had been a bad bet. I stepped back in and told Wolfe, "All four of them. Dell, Ferris, Hannah, and Martha Kirk."

He glared at me. "You invited them?"

"No, sir. It's a surprise party. People have no consideration. They might at least have phoned."

"It's impossible! I'm not ready. I haven't prepared my mind." He ran his fingers through his hair. "It's impossible. Bring them in."

I went to the front, opened the door, and invited them to enter. Martha Kirk, first in, did not curtsy, and Raymond Dell didn't bow. When I turned after shutting the door she was sitting on the bench pulling off her galoshes and the men were removing their coats. "Have you written your piece?" Dell demanded.

That had been so long ago, eight whole hours, that for a second I didn't get him. "Oh," I said. "I had forgotten I was doing one. I got interrupted."

"We want to see Nero Wolfe," Martha Kirk said. "And you."

"Then you might as well have us together. This way." I went to the office door and stood aside, and they filed in. Wolfe arose, inclined his head an eighth of an inch as I pronounced each name, and sat. He never shakes hands with strangers. I was going to put Martha Kirk in the red leather chair, but Dell beat us to it, so I moved up a yellow one for her, next to me, and Ferris and Hannah moved their own, beyond her. Wolfe's eyes went from left to right and back again.

"Go ahead, Martha," Paul Hannah said. "This was your idea."

"No," Martha said, "it was Hattie's idea." She was still ornamental, and the dimples were still there, but she didn't look up to making an omelet of larks' eggs. She turned her face to me and then to Wolfe. "It's

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crazy," she said. "The idea that Hattie—it's just crazy."

"She doesn't mean," Noel Ferris explained, "that Hattie's idea is crazy, she means the idea that Hattie killed Tammy Baxter. Hattie's idea was that we should come and see you."

"According to Martha," Paul Hannah said.

"Idiot children," Raymond Dell rumbled. His hat had pressed his white mane down, but it was starting to unfurl. "Snapping and yapping in the face of tragedy."

"Death isn't tragedy," Ferris said. "Life is tragedy."

"Was it Miss Annis' idea," Wolfe inquired, "that you should come and expound philosophy to me? Miss Kirk. I gather that she spoke with you?"

Martha nodded. "She spoke *to* me. She said she had hired you and Mr. Goodwin to make the cops eat dirt, and we must come and tell you everything we had told the cops."

"When did she hire you?" Hannah demanded. His chubby pink cheeks were a little saggy.

Wolfe ignored him and kept his eyes at Martha. "What else did she say?"

"Nothing. She couldn't. I was coming downstairs, and they were carrying her out, and she saw me and said that, and I said we would. Of course I couldn't tell the others then, they were still questioning us, but I did as soon as they left."

"They were carrying her literally? Bodily?"

"Yes. Two men."

"Had they forced the door of her room?"

"Yes."

Wolfe grunted. "Possibly actionable. For the record, Miss Annis is my client, but my job is not as she defined it. I have engaged to investigate the murder that was committed in her house."

"It wasn't committed by her," Martha declared. "But they've arrested her. It's crazy!"

"It was committed by a sex maniac," Paul Hannah said. "Twice last week a man followed her right to the door. When she told me about it I offered to ambush him, but she said no, if he did it again and came close she would handle him. She would too."

Noel Ferris twisted his lip. "Lochinvar Hannah," he drawled. "These sex maniacs are damn clever. Of course getting in wasn't much—he could have a bag of assorted keys; but getting the knife from the kitchen was a real stroke. We know he did because you identified it."

"You keep harping on that." Hannah's cheeks were pinker.

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"Certainly I identified it, with that nick in it. I supposed you all would. I knew Hattie would."

"I did," Martha said.

Ferris turned a hand over. "Then I should have too. I was too sentimental, I always am. I had a vague notion that it would be better to leave it plausible that the knife was a stranger. Also I am too sensitive. I couldn't bear the thought that the knife I had sliced ham with had been . . ." He finished it with a gesture, an actor's gesture.

Raymond Dell snorted. "Adolescent imbeciles! All three of you! We came here to serve a friend in whose debt we are, not to prattle. Tammy Baxter was new in that house, not yet of us. For all we know, Hattie may have had reason to fear her beyond endurance. In a frenzy of fear, in the panic of desperation, she killed her. That is quite possible. We know that Hattie was not herself. We thought her incapable of guile, but she brought this man Goodwin, a professional detective—she brought him there and presented him to Martha and me in false colors."

Ferris' brows were up. "But you came here to serve her?"

"I did." Dell's boom would have carried to the gallery if there had been one. "Whether she killed or not, whether she was wise to trust her fate to this man Wolfe and this man Goodwin—we are not to judge. We can only ask, what can we do or say to help her?" His deep-set blue-gray eyes focused on Wolfe. "And we can only ask you."

Martha Kirk put in, "Hattie said we should tell him everything we told the cops."

Wolfe shook his head. "That may not be necessary. I hope not." He cleared his throat. "It has already been of some slight help to sit and listen to you; that is inherent in the situation. When four people are conversing in my presence and I know that one of them committed murder less than twelve hours ago, I would be a dolt to get no inkling at all. Look at you now—your reaction to what I just said. You are all staring at me. One of you opened his mouth to interrupt, but closed it. None of you glances at the others, or at any other. But I know that one of you is feeling the pinch. He is asking himself, are my eyes all right, how about my mouth, should I say something? He is aware, of course, that it will take more than an inkling to undo him; but an inkling can give me a start."

It wasn't giving me one. They all kept their stares at

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him. Martha's lips were parted, and Ferris' were twisted. Paul Hannah's jaw was working. Dell's chin was up and he was frowning. Ferris demanded, "You *know* it was one of us? How?"

"Not by an inkling, Mr. Ferris. There is the knife, and there is my conviction, on grounds that satisfy me, that Miss Annis didn't use it. But that isn't all. I prefer not to disclose why she took Mr. Goodwin to her house in masquerade; though one of you has certainly guessed why I'll leave it a guess."

He flattened his palms on the chair arms. "And now we may proceed. Three of you came here to help a friend, and one of you came because he didn't dare to refuse, nor will he dare to refuse to answer my questions; and I expect him to expose himself. If he has already exposed himself to the police we are wasting our time, but I'll proceed on the assumption that he hasn't. If I fail, it will be because I haven't asked the right questions—and I don't intend to fail."

His head turned. "Mr. Dell. Have you paid your room rent for the past three months?"

(continued on page 92)

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REX STOUT GRIFFEN'S FIRST CASE

Josh Pachter, you will recall, is the creator of Inspector Ross Griffen of the Tyson County Police Force, a widower with eleven children all of whom he has named after detective heroes (and one heroine) of his youthful reading. The first and middle names of the ten sons are Peter Wimsey, Albert Campion, John Jericho, Parker Pyne, Gideon Fell, Augustus Van Dusen, Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, Ellery Queen, and Nero Wolfe. The only daughter is named Jane Marple Griffen.

You will also recall that Mr. Pachter has already given us two cases about E. Q. Griffen (December 1968 and May 1970). Now he gives us the first recorded case about ten-year-old Nero Wolfe Griffen and his best friend, Archie Goodwin—oops, pardon, Artie Goodman—an undeniably Neroish and Wolfean investigation . . .

Josh Pachter was 18 years old when he wrote "Sam Buried Caesar." What will he write when he is 28? When he is 38? The mind boggles . . .

SAM BURIED CAESAR

by JOSH PACHTER

For the fifty-millionth time, my name is *not* Archie Goodwin! It's *Artie*, Artie *Goodman*—Arthur Eliot Goodman, Junior, to be exact. But ever since we moved in next door to Inspector Ross Griffen and his brood about a year ago, and ten-year-old Nero Wolfe and I became best friends, I've been Archie Goodwin to everyone in town.

Not that I mind the comparison, you understand. Nero got me interested in the Wolfe stories and I've read most of them by now; Archie's pretty cool and everything, even though he keeps talking about these dumb *girls* all the time, but it's just that I don't want to be typed as Nero Griffen's legman for the rest of my life.

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I mean, I'm pretty smart myself, you know. I was the one who found Lou Kramer's missing bicycle, not Nero, and if it wasn't for me asking the right question at the right time, we would *never* have discovered who was shoplifting from Mr. Tierney's five and dime.

And even though Wolfe beat me to it, without so much as getting out of his chair, I *did* solve the mystery of Sam Cabot's dog Caesar all on my own.

It was the end of June, about a week after Wolfe had gotten out of fourth grade and I'd escaped from third, when we decided to form our own detective agency. I kind of liked "Griffen and Goodman, Private Investigators," myself, but Nero insisted on "The Nero Wolfe Detective Service" and I didn't make a fuss—I'd gone along with the idea for the fun of it, anyway, not for the glory.

Our first couple of days were pretty slow, but soon the word got around and cases started leaking in—mostly lost toys and things, nothing really interesting at first. Nero proved pretty good at tracking down that kind of stuff and we began to build up a reputation of sorts. After three weeks we risked raising our retainer from a dime to fifteen cents, and nobody seemed to mind.

Somewhere along the line Nero's brother Sherlock got into the act. He wasn't much good, but he didn't bother anyone, so we let him hang around until the day he deduced, from a rip in my shirt and the dirt under my fingernails, that *I* was the one who'd been swiping apples from the tree in Jerry Tieger's back yard. At that point we decided that Sherlock had to go—actually, *I* decided that either he went or I did, and Wolfe agreed that my detective abilities were more important than mere family ties.

So Sherlock was banished from the agency, and Nero and I went back to handling our couple of cases a day, all by ourselves. We averaged thirty-five to forty cents a case, and more from grownups, plus expenses—which was nowheres near as profitable as a good paper route but lots more enjoyable.

Agency business took up most of our time, and as a result we didn't get to see old friends as often as we used to. I hadn't spoken to Sam Cabot in weeks when I walked into the Griffen garage, our office, one morning in August and found him seated in one of the yellow folding chairs we kept around for clients.

"Hi, Archie," Sam said, with

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a mournful look on his face.

"Artie," I said automatically. "Hi, Sam. What's up?"

"I just finished telling Nero," Sam answered. "It's about my dog."

"Caesar?"

"Sure, Caesar!" Sam exploded. "He's my dog, isn't he? I—I mean, he *was* my dog."

I pounced. "What do you mean, *was* your dog? Has something happened to him?"

"You're as sharp as a tack today, aren't you, Artie?" Nero chuckled. "Sam you'd better go back to the beginning and fill my partner in."

"There's not much to tell," Sam began slowly. "I was out playing with Caesar about three hours ago, at that vacant field at the corner of Hoover and Berkshire. I was throwing a rubber ball around, and Caesar was fielding. Well, the ball got away from me and rolled into Berkshire, and Caesar ran after it. There's a thirty-mile-an-hour speed limit there, but this late-model, off-white convertible came tearing down Hoover, doing fifty at least, and made the turn into Berkshire without even slowing down. The driver must have seen Caesar, because he slammed on his brakes, but he was too late—he hit him. The guy started to pull over, then he changed his mind and beat it."

"Did you get his license-plate number?" I asked.

"He was going too fast. They were out-of-state plates, I could see that, and I think the last number was a three or an eight, but I'm not sure. Anyway, I was too worried about Caesar to think much about the car. I ran up to him, I remember looking around for help and not seeing any other people or cars nearby, so I dragged him to the sidewalk, off of the street.

"There was blood all over the place. I felt for his heartbeat, but I couldn't find it. Caesar was dead."

Sam slowly shook his head from side to side. He didn't look like he was going to be doing any more talking for a while, so I shifted my glance to Nero.

"Sam then moved the corpse to a corner of the vacant field," Nero told me, "and ran home to tell his parents what had happened and to find out what he should do. There was no one home."

"I—I couldn't just leave him there, lying around with blood all over him and everything," Sam sniffled, "so I took a shovel and went back to the vacant field and dug a big hole and buried him. After I filled in the hole I just stood there for a while and, well, cried. I *loved* that dog, Archie!"

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"Artie," I said. "So you want us to find out who killed your dog?"

"There's more to the story," Nero frowned. "Go on, Sam."

"Well, I f-finally went home and sort of mooned around for a while. Then I decided to go back and get Caesar's collar and tags, so I'd have something to remember him by. So I went to the field and dug up the grave and—and—"

"And what?" I prompted.

"And Caesar's body was gone."

"What!" I yelled.

"You heard him, Artie," Nero growled. "He dug up the grave and the dog's body was gone."

"He must have dug in the wrong place," I said.

"No!" Sam cried. "I didn't!"

Nero leaned back.

"This is about where you came in, Artie," he said. "Sam was telling me that, because it hasn't rained around here in almost a week, the top layer of dirt at the vacant field has turned a kind of dry, dusty, light brown. When he dug the hole and buried Caesar, moister dark-brown dirt from underneath got left on top of the grave. Sam?"

"So when I went back for the collar and tags," our client said, "I just looked for the spot where the dirt was dark-brown instead of light, and dug there. And Caesar was gone."

"Do you have any idea why someone would want to steal Caesar's corpse?" I asked.

"No, I can't see why *anyone* would do a thing like that! I can't figure it out at all!" Sam's voice trembled.

"Who knew where you buried your dog?"

"No one—well, I didn't *tell* anyone, not even that he was dead. But I guess a few people walked by while I was digging the grave, and some cars must have passed by, too, and they might have seen what I was doing."

"Did you recognize any of the people or cars that passed?"

"No, none. But I wasn't looking at them carefully or anything."

"Could the convertible that killed Caesar have been one of the cars that passed?" Nero asked.

"I—I didn't notice, really. I don't *think* so."

"What about the driver?" I said. "Could he have been one of the people who walked by?"

"I guess so. I don't know. I just wasn't paying much attention to anything except Caesar."

"All right, Sam," Nero said, rising, "that's all we need to hear right now. We'll take your case."

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"You'll find out who killed Caesar?" Sam asked eagerly.

"No promises. But we'll do our best."

"And you'll get the body back?"

"We'll try. Our retainer is fifteen cents, which you can give to Artie. Of course, the final fee will depend on our results. We'll get back to you as soon as we can, maybe today or tomorrow."

Sam got up from his yellow chair.

"Thanks, Nero," he said, shaking Wolfe's hand goodbye. "I really mean it, thanks a lot."

Then he handed me a sticky dime and a nickel, shook *my* hand, and said, "You, too, Archie. Thanks."

"Artie," I said, as I pocketed the coins and ushered Sam out of our office.

Numbers have always fascinated me.

Like, did you know that if you multiply any number, any number at all, by nine, and then add up the digits of the product, and then add up the digits of that sum, and keep adding until you wind up with a single digit, that final digit will *always* be nine?

Or did you ever notice that, out of all the millions of squiggles that *could* have been chosen to represent our ten numerals from zero to nine, two of the ten that *were* chosen happened to be shaped exactly the same? The only difference between a six and a nine is that one of them, and I wish I knew which one, is upside down.

That particular afternoon, as I pedaled along Berkshire toward Hoover and the vacant field, I was thinking about how a three is just an eight with the left side sliced off, and how it would be easy to mix up a three and an eight if your mind was on something else and you only got a quick look. People get confused when they're worried about the life of a loved one, I thought, even when the loved one is an animal, and they can't be expected to pay attention to trivial details. Still, I wished Sam could have been more definite about the license plate of that convertible.

After Sam Cabot left the Griffen garage, Nero and I had tried to figure out why anyone would want to steal the body of a dead dog. Even alive, Caesar was just a scrawny little dachshund, not worth much of anything. Why was he so important now that he was dead?

The most logical answer seemed to be that the hit-and-run driver felt that somehow he could be identified through the corpse of his victim, so he had

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returned to the scene of his crime and removed the incriminating corpse. It didn't make much sense, but that was the best we could come up with, so my job was now to investigate the scene for clues, and then to hunt for an off-white, late-model convertible with out-of-state plates and a license number ending in either a three or an eight.

I braked at the corner of Berkshire and Hoover and got off my bicycle, leaving it on the sidewalk with the kickstand down.

Carrying a shovel in my right hand I explored the vacant field. Most of the lot was nothing more than the dusty light-brown dirt that Sam had described, with small patches of weeds and crabgrass here and there and yellowed papers and slivers of grass scattered all around. Two sides of the field were open, bordering on Berkshire and Hoover, and the other sides were separated from the adjoining lots by a tall wooden fence.

I quickly located the circular patch of dark, recently turned earth which showed where Sam had buried the dead body of his dog, and began digging. After twenty minutes or so I had hollowed out a hole about four feet deep and found nothing but four feet of dirt. Satisfied that Caesar was indeed not where he was supposed to be I filled in the hole and went back to my bicycle.

This may sound a lot like second guessing now, but as I climbed on my bike I took a good look around and I got the funniest feeling that something was missing, something *besides* the body I'd been looking for. You know how it is—you know something is wrong but you just can't pin it down. Something was missing, something that *should* have been there, and I sat for a while trying to figure out what the heck it was. Finally I shrugged, and giving up for the time being, pushed off.

I rode around town for a long time looking for the murder car. I saw off-white convertibles with in-state plates, and out-of-state plates on old off-white sedans, but I drew an absolute blank on late-model, off-white converts with the right kind of plates. Even *without* the three or eight at the end of the number.

Disappointed, I turned back to the road. But while I'd been looking in different directions I'd been steering blind, and now I found myself heading straight for a parked station wagon. I swerved toward the curb and backpedaled hard, trying to avoid a crash. At the last second I closed my eyes.

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There was a sharp jolt as I smacked into something, and I spilled off my bicycle onto the sidewalk. I opened my eyes and saw that I had missed the station wagon and had hit the curb instead. I just lay on the cement for a while, groggy, until I was sure I could get up. A small group of people had collected, mostly kids, and a man helped me to my feet.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said, "I think so."

My knees hurt and my arms hurt and I think my teeth even hurt, but I could see that I wasn't bleeding anywhere, so I—

No blood.

My head was swimming and there were kids and grownups all around me asking questions left and right, but the words "no blood" were like jackhammers inside my brain, pounding so hard that I had to pay attention to them and to nothing else. No blood, *no blood, NO BLOOD!*

Caesar was struck by a convertible on Berkshire, Sam had said, and before he died he had bled all over the place. Those were Sam's own words.

I picked up my shovel, pushed through the crowd of onlookers, got on my bicycle, and rode back to the vacant field at the corner of Berkshire and Hoover. As I rode I glanced down at my badly skinned arms. The pain had died down to a steady throbbing, and small flecks of red oozed out at several spots. Blood.

Caesar was hit by a car and had bled all over the place.

But when I got to Berkshire there was no blood on the street, no blood on the sidewalk, no blood anywhere.

Blood! *That's* what had been missing!

But why?

The street cleaners only came by early in the morning. And what about the sidewalk? And the field itself? Who could have cleaned Caesar's blood from the field? And why?

Then slowly, piece by piece, the puzzle fitted itself together inside my head. Caesar killed, no blood, body stolen . . .

I rode over to Sam's house, and leaving my bike in the driveway I carried my shovel into the back yard.

I found what I was looking for in a strawberry patch in a corner of the yard. The patch had just been watered, so the soil was all a rich chocolaty-brown, but at the very rear of the patch, where no berry plants were growing, there was a small, slightly raised mound of dirt.

The mound was roughly the same size and shape as the dark spot I had dug up earlier, at the vacant field.

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I started shoveling.

When I entered our office for the second time that day I was tired, sweaty, and awfully proud of myself.

Nero was still seated in his overstuffed leather armchair, and Sam Cabot once again was sitting in one of the yellow folding chairs. When I walked in they were discussing the relative merits of two different ways of making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Nero insisted that to get the best combination of flavors you had to spread the peanut butter on one slice of bread and the jelly on another, and then kind of *smish* the two slices together. But Sam held out for spreading both peanut butter and jelly onto the *same* slice of bread, and then putting the unspread slice on top to finish the sandwich.

I listened to the debate for a couple of minutes, until I got good and hungry. Then I smacked my lips nice and loud. Sam and Nero looked at me.

"Hi, Archie," Sam greeted.

I stood there for a few moments, deciding whether or not to remember that Sam was a client.

"What's the matter, Arch?"

"Artie," I said menacingly. "My name is Artie."

Sam was startled.

"S-sure," he mumbled.

"Sure, *Artie*."

"That's better," I growled.

"Are you finished, Arthur?" Nero asked politely. He called me Arthur when he wasn't mad at me but when he wanted people to think he was.

"Just about," I smiled. "Sir."

"Very good. Sam and I were talking about peanut butter and jelly, and I think we're about ready for a practical demonstration. Have you eaten?"

"That can wait," I said. "First I'd like to report."

"Something important?"

"You could call it that. I've solved the case."

"*This* case?" he asked, nodding toward Sam Cabot.

"Right."

"Well, then," Nero smiled, "you'd better go ahead and report. Verbatim."

"What verbatim?" I scowled. "I haven't said two words to anybody all day! I just rode around! Now do you want me to report or not?"

"Certainly, Artie. Go right ahead."

"Okay," I said. And I told Nero and Sam how I'd gone to the field and dug up the empty grave, and how I'd *known* that there was something missing besides the dead dachshund but couldn't pin down what it was. Then I told them how I'd

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suddenly realized that what had been missing at the vacant field was—

"Blood," Nero interrupted.

"Huh?" I said.

"That's what was missing. There should have been Caesar's blood all over the place, but there wasn't."

"When were you there?" I demanded.

"I haven't been out of this chair all day, Artie."

"Sam told you, then!"

"Sam told me nothing," he said smugly. "I told Sam, and he admitted I was right."

"Well, then, how did you—"

"Proceed, Artie."

I didn't feel nearly so proud of myself any more. If Nero hadn't left his chair at all, and Sam hadn't told him anything, how did he—

"There wasn't any blood on Berkshire, or on the sidewalk, or on the field," I said, "so I just thought about it until I figured it out. Was pretty simple, really. The obvious thing for me to do was to grab my shovel and—"

"And go to Sam's house."

"There's no way you can know I did that, Nero!" I exploded.

"I don't *know* what you did, Artie. I *assume* that you went over to Sam Cabot's because that's what *I* would have done if I'd been in your place. The fact that I'm right and you *did* go there doesn't make me a mindreader, it just confirms my opinion that you've got brains."

"All right," I said. "I went over to Sam's and went into the backyard and suppose you tell me what I found in the strawberry patch?"

"Now, you see," Nero said patiently, "there are *some* things I haven't been able to figure out by myself. I know you dug a hole in Sam's back yard, but the fact that you dug it in a strawberry patch is news to me. How did you know just where to dig? Different-colored dirt again?"

"No, the whole patch had just been watered. I—"

"Ah, then you must have come across a small mound of earth and guessed that was the spot. Correct?"

"Yeah, great. I dug there, about three feet down, and found—"

"Caesar's body."

"Caesar's body. Will you let me finish one sentence, Nero, just *one?*"

"I'm sorry, Artie. Go on."

"Caesar's hair was all matted and sticky from dried blood," I said. "He smelled like lemonade, and there was a note pinned to his left ear reading, 'I wish you'd keep your crummy dog off of my field. He keeps bleeding on the crabgrass.' "

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Nero blinked his large hazel eyes.

I continued, "The note was signed, 'Love and kisses, The Phantom of the Opera.' And the whole thing was written in green ink."

Nero blinked again. Then he said, "In *your* handwriting."

I swallowed, hard.

"All right, Nero," I said, "I give up. I found Caesar's body, tags and all. He was dead, but he looked perfectly okay. No blood, no note, no nothing."

"I'd already figured out that was the case, Artie," Nero murmured.

"Yeah, I bet you did. Now tell me how you did it, and then tell me what it's all supposed to mean, if you're so smart."

"How is easy. What's a little harder, but I'm sure you've worked most of it out yourself. After you left this afternoon for the vacant field I just sat here and thought about the case. I wasn't satisfied with our conclusion that the hit-and-run driver had stolen Caesar's body to avoid being identified. The more I thought about that possibility, the less sense it made.

"But it still seemed obvious that the body was stolen because there was something wrong with it, something that *someone* didn't want us to see.

"What could be wrong?

"Well, the only thing I knew about Caesar's body was that it had been struck by a car and there was lots of blood. What could be wrong with *that?*

"And then the whole thing came rushing at me like a swimming pool does after you've jumped off the high-diving board. Smack! I had it!

"We weren't supposed to see the body because there *wasn't* any blood on it! Once we saw it we'd know that Caesar hadn't been hit by a car at all.

"So Sam had lied about the car, lied about the blood—in fact, Sam had even lied about burying Caesar in the vacant field. Caesar's body wasn't stolen from the field—*it just wasn't there to begin with!*

"Once I'd worked all of this out, I called my brother Perry Mason in, and asked him to go get Sam. When Sam got here, I told him I knew his story was a pack of lies and demanded that he tell me the truth.

"Sam, tell Artie what you *told me.*"

"I—I'm sorry it worked out this way, Ar—*Artie,*" Sam began, "but Nero's right. You see, I was playing with my chemistry set this morning and I mixed a lot of the things together—calcium carbonate, tannic acid, all kinds of chemicals. Then I decided to do

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an experiment and feed the mixture to Caesar. I didn't think anything would happen! I just stirred it into his water dish and watched him lap it up. He seemed to really like it."

Sam wiped the back of his hand across his sunburnt nose and sniffled.

"Nothing much happened for a few minutes," he continued, "but then Caesar started to whine, like. I tried to get him to stop but he kept whining and moaning and everything, and finally he just lay down and closed his eyes and started shivering.

"In a little while he stopped shivering, and I felt for his heartbeat, but it was gone. I'd killed him.

"I was scared, Artie, real scared! Then I thought about telling everyone that a car hit him and killed him. If I made up a description of some out-of-state car I figured everybody would look for it for a while and then give up and forget all about it.

"But I realized that when you saw Caesar you'd know no car had hit him because there was no blood. And I knew I couldn't hit him myself and make him bleed—I just couldn't hit Caesar."

"But you gave him that junk from the chemistry set," I said, disgusted.

"I didn't think it would hurt him! It's not the same thing, don't you understand?"

Sam's small skinny frame started quivering and I turned away. I don't like to see fellows cry, and I wasn't feeling any too sympathetic toward Sam in the first place.

"All *right*," I said. "So it was an accident. What happened next?"

Sam kept on sobbing.

"Nero?" I said.

"I accused Sam of killing Caesar in a way that left no visible marks. He then told me about the chemistry set. But, you see, I had already deduced—"

"I *believe* you!" I shouted. "Just tell me what happened!"

"Well," Nero harrumphed, "let me see. Sam buried his dog in his back yard, then went to the vacant field at Berkshire and Hoover and dug a hole. When he had filled in the hole he noticed the difference in color between where he'd dug and the dirt all around, so he went home and watered down the strawberry patch, just to play it safe. He didn't want anyone noticing that someone had been digging in his back yard, not with Caesar's body supposedly missing. But he didn't notice that the dirt was a little higher where he had buried Caesar than anywhere

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else. And then he came to us with his story."

"And by the time I finally realized that no blood on Berkshire meant that Caesar hadn't been run over and found the body and figured that *Sam* had killed him, you'd already doped it all out. So what do we do now, Chief?"

"Well, Artie, Caesar's death *was* an accident, and you can see how badly Sam feels about it. I told him we'd keep our mouths shut and help spread the story of a hit-and-run. It'll keep Sam out of trouble."

"You mean we play it like we couldn't find the killer?"

"Right. And since our taking money for keeping quiet sounds too much like blackmail I've given back Sam's retainer.

"Now, as I said before, when you got here Sam and I were about to test our theories about how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and I . . ."

So Nero Wolfe had solved the case, refused payment, let the criminal off, and was now getting ready to *feed* him. All without lifting his slightly pudgy ninety-five pounds from his chair. And what did I have to show for it? A wasted afternoon, dirty clothes, and a lot of bruises.

I sighed, and went out to fetch peanut butter, jelly, and bread.

One last thing.

Our ruse worked real good, and pretty soon people stopped looking for the nonexistent off-white convertible. Sam's parents even bought him another dachshund, a female this time, which Sam named Cleopatra.

And when Cleo had pups, months later, I strolled into our office one afternoon after school to find Nero playing with the pride of the litter.

"Sam give you that?" I asked.

"Yes. As a token of his thanks."

"What are you going to call it?"

"Him," Nero corrected. "I can't decide."

"How about Fido?"

"How about shutting up? I want his name to have something to do with what he looks like. Like you'd call a spotted dog Spot or a red one Red."

I looked at Cleo's pride. It—I mean he—was a small, dark-brown, very fat puppy.

"How about Fat Fido?" I suggested.

"Artie."

"Plump Prince?" I asked meekly.

"Pfui," Nero Wolfe replied.

"Hey, I've got it! Call him Stout Rex," I said, and ran for cover.

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a NEW and strange story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Would you like to puzzle over a story? Dig into its possible meanings? Try one interpretation, then another, possibly a third? . . . Well, here's your chance—a golden opportunity—on a short-short by one of the most thought-provoking (and sometimes thought-frustrating) mystery magicians of our time . . . Further comment after you have read Avram Davidson's newest story . . .

THE TREFOIL COMPANY

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

"No," said Mrs. Nolte, who had been with the firm for quite some time, "that's certainly no matter to take up the first thing with Old Herbert. What the first thing he ever learned was, 'Buy at ninety days, sell at thirty days,' and if you come up with some notion of how to buy at say ninety-*one* days and sell at say twenty-*nine* days, then he'd be the very first partner you want to talk to. But not about serving any little sandwiches with the coffee break, no. *Not* him. Not *him*."

Marlene, who was new at The Trefoil Company, said, "Well, *I* didn't know. My brother-in-law's sister was the one who showed me this clipping, from the house newspaper where he works, and it's got a lot of *fig*ures in it: so I thought, Old Herbert."

Mrs. Nolte took Marlene and the clipping in with her to see Mr. George and talk about it. Mrs. Nolte didn't want all the credit if the idea went over, and she didn't want all the blame if it didn't.

" '*Brightens the coffee break and adds to employee efficiency at small cost,*' " he read. Then he rubbed his mustache. "Something to think about," he said, scribbling his initials on the clipping and making a note on his pad. "Tell you what, see if Les has any ideas. I'll tell him you're coming in," he said,

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reaching to the intercom. "I'll—say, I appreciate your discussing it with me. Never too busy to talk to our own employees."

Lester, who was on top of his funny desk, dressed in leotards and sitting in the lotos position, said nothing to them as they entered. Mrs. Nolte never blinked an eyelash and held the clipping in front of his face. She must have just stood there a whole minute. Then, all of a sudden, he jumped up, took the clipping from her, and started turning cartwheels across the floor. "Thanks, Lester," she said, giving Marlene a poke, and out they went.

"Oh, he's so handsome!" the girl said. "But what a *nut!*"

Serene was the word for Mrs. Nolte. "When they're that important you don't call them nuts," she said. "You *used* to term them 'eccentric,' but now the word is 'creative.' Boy, is he ever creative, Lester."

Marlene snickered. "Well, at least he had something like *clothes* on just now," she said. Mrs. Nolte gave her a look. "Only what I *heard*—but if you ever hear me scream—" The older woman nodded and repeated the last word in a low tone of voice skeptically.

An order went down to the Design Shop, marked *RUSH, Les*, and some weird things came back up. "Darndest-looking cookie cutters I ever seen," was the comment of Al, the foreman. Mr. George spoke to Mrs. Nolte about them. When she took Old Herbert his invariable lunch of a glass of milk, an apple, and a ham sandwich, the weird things were on the plate, all put together somehow.

Old Herbert looked up from his sheets and sheets of figures, and gestured. Mrs. Nolte pressed down on the sandwich. He took the pieces of it apart, easily. Now there were seven or eight cute little sandwiches, all in different and funny designs.

"Man is right," said Old Herbert. "No waste pieces at all. Waste not, want not. Man sometimes has good ideas."

Mrs. Nolte said, "I bet you don't always have the same supper as you do lunch."

"Man doesn't want a sandwich when he comes home from work. Man wants pot roast and potatoes." He squared his gray-suited shoulders, picked up a bite to eat and a sheet of figures.

Mr. George was jovial in the elevator with The Trefoil Company employees. Mr. George was going to a fancy restaurant with a few prospective customers. Sometimes Les cooked himself a pot of pickled snails or something like that,

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sometimes he ate a big bag of organic pumpkin chips or something like *that*, and sometimes he was seen in mod clothes at a hotdog stand with the shipping clerks.

By the time Mrs. Nolte saw Old Herbert again he had figured out a new way to save the company three mills per gross on another item. Also, he waved his hand at the funny sandwich cutters. "Might pay us to put in a line of those," he said. "Ask Planning to work on it." He picked up his sheets of figures.

Mrs. Nolte took the memo for Planning in to Mr. George for his initials. He was slightly more red-faced than usual and he smelled of the best brandy and was humming as he blocked out a new contract. Les was wearing cricket flannels, and with him and also wearing cricket flannels was a—a—one of them

"Nolte, this is Darcy Plantagenet from Jamaica who will be working with me on, oh, things," said Lester.

Darcy Plantagenet of Jamaica looked critically at Les's stance. "I said, 'Show me a *leg*,' " said Darcy Plantagenet of Jamaica.

The funny little sandwiches were a big success at the afternoon coffee break (with tea optional) as an experiment. Although none were left over to get stale, yet everyone seemed to have had enough. The concensus was that a breakdown of three-fifths from The Trefoil Company and two-fifths from the Employees' Rec Fund would be sufficient to pay for the little sandwiches in the future. A woman named Elaine, from the steno pool, who was fairly ugly and no chicken, didn't want any, however, and after Mrs. Nolte had conferred with her in the Ladies Lounge and made her blow her nose, they went in to see Mr. George.

"Elaine says she is in the family way, and she names Lester," said Mrs. Nolte, getting right to the point.

Mr. George said, "Oh, my. Well, I am very—I mean, you have my complete—well, now, Elaine, have you discussed this with Lester?"

She nodded. "Either he *laughs*," she said, "or he gives me a list of the craziest names for children you ever *saw*. Or like that last time he—well, he made me an indecent proposition. I suppose I'll have to destroy myself by jumping off a building or something," she said glumly.

But Mr. George showed how shocked he was and brought her a glass of water himself. "There is a very discreet agency we can contact for you," he said. "Or,

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there is, I believe, a doctor in, I believe—"

Now it was Elaine's turn to be shocked. Then she lit a cigarette, put her elbows on his desk, and leaned forward. "No, you see," she explained, "I have this aunt and uncle and they never had any children, but I can't show up there while I'm—well, till afterwards, because they got to be able to say it's a regular adoption because of the neighbors."

Mr. George, nodding very rapidly, assured her that he understood perfectly and that all arrangements would be made, including expenses. "Only, you understand, Elaine, that Old Herbert must never know. He just wouldn't understand. So, then, Mrs. Nolte, make out the check for, *you* know—"

He winked elaborately. She knew.

"And—what did you say, Elaine? Oh, certainly. Oh, yes. We want you to come back. And you mustn't think too badly of Les. He is young, you know And he is very, uh—"

"Creative," said Mrs. Nolte.

At five after five she started turning out lights for the benefit of Old Herbert, who never checked the other floors anyway. Then she turned out the lights in the office of Mr. George and the office of Lester. On the funny desk was an unfinished collage of rose petals, candy wrappers, and bus transfers. And into the changing-room, of course, she never went.

The traffic was worse than usual and it took him a full hour getting home. His mother-in-law was visible two rooms away, as she usually was, no matter what room he happened to be in. His wife said, "I hope you had a good day at the office. The store made another mistake about my charge account and Meg wants to spend the weekend in New York with that exchange student and his family and of course he hasn't really got a family there and Mr. McDonald telephoned and said he'd call back."

He said, "Oh, nuts."

"Well, that's the way it is, and I can't do anything about it. What I can do anything about is a dry martini, a nice home-cooked meal, lots of loving, and a good night's sleep."

The phone rang and they both turned to it but the mother-in-law got to it first. "Herbert George Lester residence," they heard her say. Then she pointed. He picked up the extension.

"Speaking," he said.

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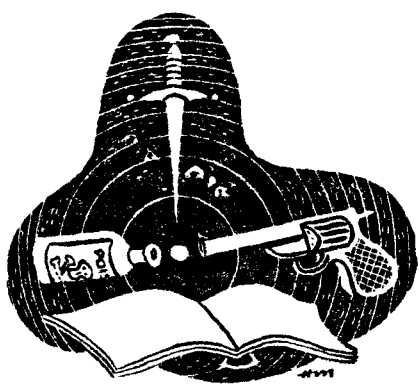
EDITORIAL COMMENT Puzzling, isn't it? Surely one of Avram Davidson's most baffling performances . . .What theories did you come up with? That *The Trefoil Company* is purely surrealistic? That it's all fantasy, that it never happened except in someone's (the author's?) mind? That the protagonist (whoever he may be!) is dangerously insane? That Avram Davidson has taken the Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde theme and given it an extra twist—extended it from two to three personalities, the third split being Herbert-George-Lester? This last hypothesis is perhaps the most fascinating one . . .



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BOX SCORE

1962–1970

In editing his second volume of *Best Detective Stories of the Year* (published in July 1970 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Allen J. Hubin selected 14 stories—13 from all the American magazines and one from a book. Of the 13 from all magazines, 7 appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—53.8%. Mr. Hubin's Honor Roll for 1970 contained 127 stories. Of these 127 stories, 70 appeared in *EQMM*—55.1% of all the distinguished mystery short stories and novelets of the year.

Here are *EQMM*'s Honor Roll percentages of new stories published in all American magazines since 1962:

1962 .....43.6%
1963 .....50.8%
1964 .....44.1%
1965 .....55.0%
1966 .....50.0%
1967 .....58.3%
(no Honor Roll published in 1968)
1969 .....48.2%
1970 .....55.1%

Thus, *more than one-half of the best new mystery stories published in all American magazines* in 8 years between 1962 and 1970 (403 stories out of 801) *appeared first in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine;* and these 403 Honor Roll stories did not include the many superior reprints which *EQMM* has given its readers throughout the years.

"*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* is the best crime-fiction periodical ever published."

Anthony Boucher, *The New York Times Book Review*, October 30, 1966

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

This month, with your permission, let preliminary words be omitted. Though no first-class detective novel has fallen into these clutches, we shall consider three explosive thrillers, two of them tales of espionage, and one real-life biography of the most famous gangland boss in underworld history. Fair enough?

As regards our two cloak-and-dagger chronicles, you might first try *The Twisted Wire*, by Richard Falkirk (Doubleday, $5.95), and begin with a roar.

About to set out for a geological conference in Israel, by mere accident placid-seeming British geologist Thomas Bartlett overhears snatches from a phone call between the President of the United States and the American Ambassador in London. Bartlett, not much enlightened by what he has overheard, is still less enlightened by subsequent events. In his briefcase he is carrying only his own professional papers, hardly of international import. And yet secret agents from five different countries want that briefcase—or they want our protagonist's blood.

Together with Raquel Rabinovitz, the attractive girl who has been studying in New York, Bartlett walks amid tall dangers from the moment his plane lands at Tel Aviv. They attempt his life in Israel's capital, they attempt his life in Jerusalem, they almost get it during that blazing confrontation in the Sinai desert, where the author has one final surprise up his sleeve before the twisted wire becomes untwisted at last.

Place of Mists, by Robert MacLeod (McCall, $4.95), also races through cloak-and-dagger deeds of the trickiest, deadliest sort. When a United Nations delegate from the Democratic Republic of Jemma, that newly emerged Arab nation, is assassinated outside U.N. headquarters in New York, the murder triggers repercussions far away. In Africa several menaces overshadow Mohammed Sharif, President of Jemma, now visiting nearby Morocco with his tough security guards and Mathilde, his French-Arab concubine.

Who threatens President Sharif, and what game has Sharif

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himself been playing in some secret deal with those Greek businessmen? To solve the problems—and, if possible, to save Sharif's life—U.N.'s Field Reconnaissance sends its most dexterous trouble-shooter, Talos Cord, with instructions to prepare for anything.

Cord, another double-o indestructible, gets help from steady-nerved Walt Jackson, from Maggie Delday, the alluring Scots girl, and from a sinister-seeming Moroccan bandit as bullets fly, blood flows in Rabat and Marrakesh alike. But the name of the game, even crookeder than it looks, we do not learn until just before mountain-battle climax, when the villains' lair is carried by storm in an armored Rolls-Royce. Recommended.

For the dirty work of espionage *Viper Three*, by Walter Wager (Macmillan, $5.95), substitutes high-powered mystery-adventure-violence on the grandest possible scale.

No criminals, of course, could possibly capture the control center of an ICBM launch site and blackmail the government with their threats. But five men from the death house convincingly do just that. Led by a brilliant former SAC officer who knows all the answers, they want five million dollars in cash, they want guaranteed air transport abroad with our most eminent American as their hostage, or they will launch the nuclear missiles at Russia and Red China to touch off World War III.

Now how can this wild *impasse* be resolved: either for wise President Stephens on one side, or, on the other, for the only two convicts who show any sign of humanity and good will? But resolved it is, at least with some degree of justice, by the time thunder has rolled away. For sheer excitement *Viper Three* equals anything I have read in several years.

Flamboyant Mr. Big himself roars or coos through John Kobler's *Capone* (Putnam, $8.95), the definitive biography of one whose name still means gangland's high khan of them all.

The book vividly traces Al Capone through gang wars to power, then through disaster to federal prison and the grave. Whatever he did, this blood-smeared romantic tried to present himself, perhaps really saw himself, as a hard-working businessman and a good fellow who meant no harm.

And the outcome for the hero? Having served his time in jail, Mr. Big emerged a broken figure, mind as well as body eaten away by syphilis; and he who had begun with a bang ended, grotesquely, without even a whimper.

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a NEW crime story by

NEDRA TYRE

"George Wooling did not agree with Thoreau that the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. He did not think people were desperate, only confused and harassed"...

AN ACT OF DELIVERANCE

by NEDRA TYRE

George Wooling was a frustrated man.

He was frustrated in every way, not just in the usual way of humankind.

Like ordinary frustrated persons he would at last get tickets to a hit show only to have the star fall ill the night George and his wife went to the theater. If he had a connection to make, buses or planes were invariably late. If he took an umbrella, it didn't rain; but let him risk going to work without taking an umbrella when there was only a slight threat of rain and a deluge would drench him.

If he had an important appointment and not a moment to spare in making it, he would always be deterred by a random meeting on the street with an acquaintance from whom he could not break away. He constantly saw the last of what he wanted to buy disappear just as it was his turn to be waited on. Squash and green peas, his favorite vegetables, were crossed off menus just moments before he sat down in a restaurant, and he had to eat something as unpalatable to him as eggplant. If he bought an appliance it would break down the day after the warranty expired.

There is no need to continue the list—George's frustrations of that kind were the same as everyone else's. But he was also frustrated in more profound ways, and had been from the time he was a child.

Since his parents were not animal lovers, they put off letting him have a dog as long as they could. They weren't cruel, but they saw his longing for a

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dog as a means of building his character, and they told him that if he did his lessons well for a year and went to Sunday school every Sunday and finished his chores without complaint he could have a dog. For a year he was honorable and diligent. No small boy ever led such a blameless life. What little time was left over from his arduous routine he spent at pet shops where he tried to decide which breed of dog he wanted most.

He vacillated from boxer to Dalmatian, German shepherd, whippet, Manchester terrier, and poodle. He was almost mad with indecision, and then one day his search ended when he saw an Irish setter.

On the day of reckoning his parents praised his perseverance, but that afternoon his maternal grandmother arrived for a brief unannounced visit. She was allergic to dogs, and the purchase of the Irish setter had to be postponed until the grandmother left. But just as she was saying goodbye and rushing to enter a taxi, she fell and broke her hip and spent a long convalescence at George's house; then she decided to make her home with them permanently. So George never did get his dog.

His paternal grandmother was quite well off and liked to travel. She decided that it would be nice to take each of her six grandchildren in succession on a trip around the world. George was the youngest, so his turn came last. Finally his time arrived. With his bags packed and hopes high, he was to leave the next day to join his grandmother in New York when the message came that she had died of a heart attack.

George was the bookish type and in high school he entered a poetry contest. One of the judges misplaced his entry and someone else won, though the judges later took him aside and said that his sonnet was the best, but by the time it had been found, the medal had already been engraved with the other boy's name. So nothing could be done about it.

From the time he was twelve George had loved and been loved by Anne Middleton. The month before they were to be married she asked for one last vacation alone. In San Francisco she visited a college chum and married one of her chum's friends after knowing him for only three days.

George's grandmother—the one who had promised him the trip around the world—left him $20,000 which he inherited on his twenty-fifth birthday. He used it to open a bookshop. It was a pleasant place with wide

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aisles and easy accessibility to the books. It attracted browsers by the hundreds, but few persons bought books. Whatever books they did buy were purchased through book clubs or at discount houses. In a frantic attempt to keep his bookshop open, George borrowed money. He added greeting cards and souvenirs, stationery and bric-a-brac and gift wrapping, all of which destroyed the literary atmosphere of his shop but did not bring in enough income to save it.

He then went to work for an office-supply company. The owner was impressed by George's ability and promised him an executive position. But the owner soon died and the new owner appointed his son-in-law.

George tried other administrative jobs. He often had every assurance that he was doing well, only to be either ousted without ceremony or ambiguously eased out. So he went back to what he liked most—books. For some years he had worked in the Reference Department of the Public Library, but his salary was modest, and to supplement it he worked two nights a week in the book section of a downtown department store. This brought back sad memories of his own bookstore and of his frustration in trying to make it a success.

George was also frustrated in his private life.

Gladys was George's greatest frustration. He had been fond of her when they married, and life with her could have been pleasant. True, he did not earn much, but affection could balance a tight budget. Besides, Gladys had a modest income inherited from her great uncle Albert, but she used it entirely for her own pleasure. She took trips with friends, played bridge for rather high stakes, and was always buying clothes.

Perhaps all the frustrations were George's fault. But he doubted it. He did not quite see how a small boy could be held to blame for the death of his grandmother which had deprived him of his trip around the world, or how he was at fault because his other grandmother broke her hip and spoiled his chance to own a dog. He did not see how he could be held responsible for the misplacing of the sonnet and, as a result, the loss of the poetry prize. But he felt that Gladys would have found reasons to put all the blame on him.

Gladys complained about the smallness of the apartment and about having a maid only once a week. If she had been

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willing to use some of her own money, they could have had a larger apartment, and though there was no need for a fulltime servant, if Gladys had really wanted one she could have hired one out of her own resources. But her income was for herself alone—not even at Christmas or on his birthday did she give George a present paid for with her personal funds. Instead, she took a few dollars out of the household money and bought him a tie or some handkerchiefs.

George wasn't bitter because of Gladys, just frustrated. He was alert and intelligent enough to realize, if not from his own observation then from the prodigious amount of reading that his two jobs required, that many marriages were dull, and too many people demanded things of life without being willing to reciprocate. He did not agree with Thoreau that the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. He did not think people were desperate, only confused and harassed. As for himself, he was simply frustrated.

And so George began to plan some decisive action. Just once before he died he would successfully complete an act of purpose, something that even the most innocent bystander would have to admit had been carried out conclusively.

He decided to murder Gladys.

He would do it deliberately so that it could never be considered an accident. He wanted credit for malice and violence and dexterity. And he wanted Gladys to be wholly aware of being murdered.

George knew nothing about guns and would be sure to miss Gladys if he tried to use one to kill her. A dagger sounded too exotic, a kitchen knife too prosaic. An ax was messy and lacked finesse.

He decided to strangle Gladys with his bare hands. There was no reason why he couldn't—she was small and he was large and his hands were strong. Even so, he practised strengthening them at every opportunity. Twice customers in the Book Department looked at him apprehensively when he made claws of his hands, and a patron at the Reference Desk in the library seemed startled when he flexed his fingers in a threatening way. After that he restricted his hand-strengthening exercises to times when he was alone.

George came to think of his murder of Gladys not as an act of cruelty but of necessity. He must have one moment of fulfillment before he died, and he had no desire at all to escape

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the consequences of his crime. Gladys must know, the world must know, and punishment would be a small forfeit to pay for an action carried out totally without frustration.

Even in anticipating the act that would free him from frustration, George's life began to take on meaning and authority. At the Book Department he began to suggest alternate titles or additional books to customers, instead of letting them leave with their choice. In the Reference Department he spoke more resolutely, pointed to the shelf where a volume was, rather than getting the book himself and handing it to a patron, and he sent people to the catalogue to do their own digging instead of doing it for them.

Having decided to strangle Gladys, his only other decision was when to do it. He decided that it must be on a Thursday, the day she most enjoyed. That was when she had her hair done so that she felt and looked her best. On Thursday afternoon she played bridge with her favorite group of friends, and it was the day that she had Pearl, the maid, and didn't have to prepare dinner. The least George could do for Gladys was to let her die when she was happiest.

He selected the particular Thursday for the murder, and from the very beginning the day produced nothing but good omens for George. Though it was cloudy, he risked going to the library without an umbrella, and the rain held off until after he had arrived. He had barely sat down at his desk when a complicated telephone question came in about some voting laws. He handled it with dispatch, and it wasn't long before the Director of the library came into the Reference Department to commend George and report that the Governor's Office had just telephoned to say what excellent service and thorough information George had given on the voting laws.

At lunch George splurged and went to an expensive restaurant. Squash and green peas were on the menu and still available when he ordered them, and his rare steak was really rare. In the middle of the afternoon a woman in tears approached the Reference Desk and asked George how to get rid of water stains on a table. George fingered through a book on household hints and told the anguished woman to take a blotter and put it on the stain, then smooth the blotter with a lightly heated iron. It sounded to George like a dubious remedy and he cautioned the

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woman that it might not work. But it did. Within an hour the woman telephoned to thank George for saving her priceless heirloom.

Throughout the day he thought of Gladys and hoped she was happy. He hoped that Antoine, her favorite, had done her hair—Antoine was very temperamental and often did not keep his appointments—and that she would have a high bridge score.

As for himself, George did not remember ever having been at such a peak of exuberance and anticipation.

All sense of frustration had drained out of him.

That evening George felt jubilant as he approached his apartment house. It was a perfectly ordinary building, he granted, with ordinary apartments, but there was nothing ordinary about the crime about to take place in it. It was to be an act of release, an act of deliverance.

George did not use his key, as it would have done no good, since Gladys always kept the chain on the door. He rang the bell and heard footsteps immediately. That meant Pearl had agreed to stay to serve dinner, an added boon to Gladys for which George was grateful. And how nice it would be to be welcomed by Pearl's smile instead of Gladys' usual querulous greeting.

When the door was opened, George greeted Pearl warmly, but she did not return his greeting or give him the smile he was expecting.

Chaos ruled the apartment. Chairs were overturned, some pictures were askew on the walls, others had fallen to the floor, lamps wore their shades at cocked angles, knickknacks had been swept from tables, rugs were rumpled, curtains sagged from drooping rods. And in one corner of their bedroom a small efficient army of men had taken possession and were bending with preoccupation over something stretched on the floor.

Pearl began to explain. "It's all so terrible, Mr. Wooling. Mrs. Wooling forgot her glasses at the house where she played bridge and told me to go get them. I asked her what about dinner, and she said dinner didn't matter, that she needed her glasses to do needlepoint tonight. I had to go a long way there and back on the bus, and then just when I got back—I guess about an hour ago—a man tore out of the living room just as I let myself in.

"He knocked me down and ran down the stairway. His pockets were bulging with silver and he had Mrs. Wooling's mink

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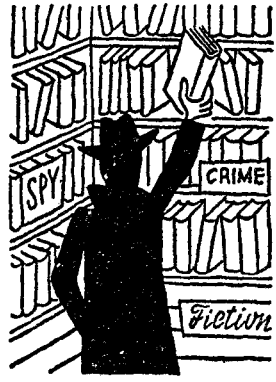
coat over his arm. I was terrified but I had sense enough to call the police. Mrs. Wooling put up a terrible fight. She fought that burglar room by room—you'll have to give her credit. Poor thing. I'm so sorry, Mr. Wooling. Who would ever have thought such an awful thing could happen?

"I tell you, Mr. Wooling, that man strangled Mrs. Wooling to death—strangled her with his bare hands."



CRIMINALIMERICK

DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

by D. R. BENSEN

At midnight, alert and alone,
I hear an unspeakable groan.
I creep down the corridor;
Horrors grow horrider,
And then—help!—ah, had I but known. . .

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 357th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Can a story be, at one and the same time, charming and creepy? Delightful and terrifying? Try this one for size—and shivers . . .

The author, Jeff Sweet, was a senior at New York University when he submitted his "first story." He was studying film and spending most of his non-school hours "pursuing a career as a playwright-critic-composer." His "immodest ambitions" also included being an actor and a director, and he has studied critical writing under Clive Barnes, songwriting under Paul Simon, and has attended the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Center's National Critics Institute. He comes by all these interests naturally: his mother was a concert violinist and his father a "public-relations speech writer."

And now, read Mr. Sweet's strange story of Mr. Stanley's shoes . . .

NIGHTMARE IN NEW YORK

by JEFF SWEET

I found it in my mail—an envelope with the picture of a simple, dignified tie-shoe in the upper left corner under which was a logotype reading: *Stanley Shoes, Mail Order Sales Department.* My first instinct was to toss it into the trash with the other junk mail, but for some reason best explained by behavioral psychologists I opened it and removed the sheet inside.

Mimeographed on stationery also bearing the illustrated logotype was the following:

Dear Friend:
I was very happy to receive your note expressing interest in making extra money selling our high-quality shoes to friends

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and neighbors. Many people across the country—men, women, young and old—have found selling Stanley Shoes a steady source of outside income. Why, they practically sell themselves!

Mr. Harry Grench of East Orange, New Jersey, sold seven pairs of our super-cushioned footwear on his very first day! Miss Sally Timble of Winnetka, Illinois, cleared over $300 in commissions in less than a month! In addition, both have won many fine prizes for themselves and their respective families.

Your Stanley Sales Outfit should arrive within a few days. Good luck!

Sincerely yours,
Milton Stanley

Of course I'd never sent Mr. Stanley a note expressing even the slightest interest in selling his high-quality shoes to friends and neighbors. All I could figure was that someone had sent in my name as a gag.

Though there was a time not too long ago when I might have considered peddling sandals. I'd just moved to New York and my career in commercial art was—well, let's say Peter Max wasn't the slightest bit worried. Then I met Susan—attractive, intelligent, rich. We were soon engaged, and we plan to get married when she was finished school. In the meantime she has seen to it that her fiancé hasn't been wasting away.

All of which added up to a thanks-but-no-thanks to Mr Stanley. And with a superbly executed backhand flip I tossed letter and envelope into the wastebasket.

A few days later, just as Milton Stanley had promised, it arrived—my Stanley Sales Outfit. It consisted of a brightly colored booklet with pictures of all the various styles in which the high-quality shoes came plus a sample of the special super-cushion that made Stanley Shoes so comfortable that "you feel like you're walking on the clouds of Heaven!" And there was another mimeographed letter from Milton Stanley.

Dear Friend:

Here is your complete Stanley Sales Outfit—all you need to sell our high-quality shoes to friends and neighbors. Soon you too will be earning high commissions part-time the Stanley way!

Since my last letter, Mr. Harry Grench of East Orange, New Jersey, has sent in his latest order, this time for 62 pairs of our super-cushioned footwear!

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And Miss Sally Timble of Winnetka, Illinois has won a free, all-expenses-paid vacation to India and the Orient!
I look forward to seeing your first orders.

Best wishes,
Milton Stanley

The Stanley Sales Outfit followed the first Stanley letter into the hands, ultimately, of the Department of Public Sanitation.

I thought no more of Mr. Stanley and his shoes for the next two months, though I did derive much comfort out of squeezing the sample of the Stanley super-cushion in moments of distress. Then, almost two months later to the day, I received another letter.

Dear Friend:
I'd like to speak to you man to man.
Two months ago, at your request, I sent you a Stanley Sales Outfit—all you needed to start you on the road to high commissions in your spare time. We are still waiting for your first order. Frankly we've been wondering where we went wrong. Is it something we've done?
I have in front of me Mr. Harry Grench's latest order. (You remember Harry. East Orange, New Jersey, ring a bell?) He hit the $1100.00 mark—a new record for sales! I also have here a letter from Miss Sally Timble. She has left Winnetka, Illinois, for a brand-new home in Park Ridge, and with her commission money has moved her mother into a rest home in Virginia!
Please let us hear from you.

Hopefully,
Milton Stanley

Feeling waggish, I took Mr. Stanley's letter and sat down at the typewriter, a Scotch-and-water within arm's reach. And I composed the following letter:

Dear Milt,
Glad to receive your last letter. Hope you and the kids are feeling well. Has Aunt Betsy gotten over the flu? And how about business? Business good? Recession hurt you?
Now, about the letter you sent me. Why, of course you may speak to me "man to man" any time you wish. I mean, didn't I always have a sympathetic ear whenever you were having problems with Jill back at old State U.? It is with a smile that I remember you timidly knocking at my door as if afraid I would jump out and brain you or something. (I think you were

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a freshman and I was a junior.) But we got to be good friends after that. Those midnight beer blasts and all. I can hardly keep from shedding a nostalgic tear. But back to your letter. I'm sorry if your faith in me has been shaken. But after Dorothy left me, I tell you, Milt, I just gave up the will to sell shoes. No, no, don't laugh. It's true. I used to consider selling your super-cushioned shoes a kind of sacred mission. But Dorothy—well, she left me and, well, I haven't told this to anyone, but she ran off with my sample super-cushion and my booklet and defected to Thom McAn! But don't worry about me. I'll be all right. I admit I was in a blue funk for a while, but I met this wonderful girl named Susan in the Rare Books Room at the library, and I think it's going to be okay from now on.

Give my best to Harry and Sally.

Kevin Ivers

I folded the letter, put it into an envelope, addressed it to Mr. Milton Stanley in care of his factory, stamped and mailed it. Good God, did I feel clever! I could just picture Stanley getting the letter and wondering, "Who the hell is Kevin Ivers?" and racking his skull to remember those beer blasts. Yes, I was very satisfied with myself and celebrated by eating dinner out at Nathan's.

A week later, however, I found another envelope with the Stanley Shoes logotype in the upper left corner waiting for me in my mailbox. I pulled out the contents—another letter on the company stationery. But this one was typed, not mimeographed! It read:

Dear Kev,

Sorry to hear about Dorothy, but that's the way the cookie crumbles. Women are like that, you know. Susan sounds nice. I hope you and she find what you're looking for, though God knows in these troubled times how hard that is!

I'm afraid all is not well with me. My brother Roger—he's in charge of production here at Stanley Shoes—he's started a power play with some of the other board members to try to force me out of the company. He denies it, of course, but I have the evidence! And the strange looks he's giving Jill. I can't quite describe the looks exactly, but they're not the kind you give another man's wife.

Also Aunt Betsy's flu has gotten worse. She was taken to the hospital last week where she is in fair condition. I suppose all I can do is pray.

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I may be in New York soon. I'd like to drop by if it's convenient.

Do you still have the sporty sideburns?

Write soon,
Milton

How the hell did he know I had sporty sideburns?

I was beginning to get a little scared. No, not scared, nervous. Actually, sort of scared nervous. How did Milton Stanley know about my sideburns? The question haunted me. Even squeezing the super-cushion did not bring me any peace. In a fit of anxiety I threw it away.

Other questions crept into my mind. Was it possible I actually knew Milton Stanley in college without knowing it? Had I listened to his problems at State U.? Did we have midnight beer blasts?

And then I'd remember that I hadn't gone to State U. and that as a student I'd loathed the taste of beer.

I shaved off my sideburns.

Soon after another letter arrived. This one was handwritten.

Dear Kev,

I haven't heard from you lately. Has something happened?

I'm afraid things here have gone from bad to worse. Aunt Betsy's flu turned into something else and she passed away last week. Harry and Sally flew in for the funeral. It was nice to see them again. I would have called you about it but I didn't want to upset you. After all, you really didn't know Betsy that well. She was a remarkable woman and the world is poorer for her passing.

Somehow I managed to rally my supporters on the board and blocked Roger and his co-conspirators' move to push me out—for the time being at any rate. I know this isn't the end of it. I can feel him plotting behind my back all the time. What really upsets me is that I'm sure Jill is in on it. You remember those looks I said he was giving her? Now she's giving them to him. I don't like it, Kev.

I heard from Mark Honig the other day. He said he saw you on the street and you'd shaved off the sideburns. He tried to catch up with you, but you and some pretty girl caught a cab before he could talk to you. I guess that must be Susan, right? Anyway, he said it was at Forty-eighth and Fifth.

Oh, what the hell am I writing this for? As if it makes any difference in the grand scheme of things. You remember our

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conversations about the grand scheme of things when we were in college? I laugh to think how naive we were then.

Your friend,
Milt

You can imagine what this letter did to me, especially since I remembered grabbing that cab with Sue at Forty-eighth and Fifth! Who was this Honig guy who'd spotted me?

A sudden inspiration. I took out the New York phone book and looked up Mark Honig. I dialed the number with a shaking hand. There came the beginning of a ring on the other end. In the middle of it someone picked up the phone.

"Hello?" someone said.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"Mark Honig," the voice replied. "That you, Kevin?"

I shuddered.

"Kev, are you there?"

"Uh, yeah, yeah," I said.

"What's the matter, Kev? You sound nervous or something." The guy actually seemed to be concerned.

"No, no, I'm okay," I insisted.

"Actually, it's a good thing you called. I lost your number and I was supposed to reach you."

"What about?"

"You know—Stinky."

"S-s-stinky?" I stuttered.

"Stinky Stanley. You remember Stinky Stanley, Kev. All those beer blasts in college."

"Right," I mumbled.

"Hey, Kev, what's happening with him? He called me and he sounded all shook up."

"Well, uh, you heard about his Aunt Betsy," I said.

"Yes, too bad. She was a good lady."

"And his brother," I continued. "You know he tried to push Stinky, uh, Milt out of the company."

"I can believe it. Roger's like that."

"Uh, Mark, what was it about Stinky you were going to—?"

"Oh, yes," said Honig. "He's coming into town."

"When?" I asked.

"Tonight. Eight forty flight from Chicago. Told me he was counting on staying with you a couple days. He tried to reach you himself, but you must've been out. Anyway, that's why I was worried about not having your number. Of course, now you've called, so you got the message and everything's okay."

"Yeah," I said.

"I've got to run," said Honig. "Dinner date. Give my best to Stinky. The three of us've got to get together at McSorley's or somewhere."

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"Right," I said. I wasn't really listening to him. I was thinking of that visitor on his way from Chicago arriving at the airport at 8:40, and if I was scared nervous before, I was plain scared now!

"Give me a call tomorrow," Honig said. "We'll arrange something." After goodbyes, he hung up.

I looked at the clock. It was 6:30. I figured mentally that it would take Stanley till nine to actually land and another hour or hour and a half to arrive by cab depending on whether he landed at La Guardia or Kennedy. That meant anywhere from 10:00 on.

My first thought was to pack an overnight bag and get the hell out of here, but then I realized I had nowhere to go. And besides, feeling very fatalistic, I figured that one way or another, some day or another, I'd have to face up to this thing, and it would probably be best to get it over with.

I called Susan and canceled our date for that night. She was good and mad. She'd picked up a pair of tickets in the orchestra for some new rock musical, but what could I do?

I tried to kill time watching TV, but reruns of *I Love Lucy* and *Gilligan's Island* didn't help much.

At 8:30 my door buzzer rang. I pressed the answer button.

"Hello?"

"It's Jill, Kev. Let me in." Her voice was very firm.

"Who?"

"Jill Stanley, Kev. Open the door—I'm freezing out here."

I obeyed, and a few minutes later Jill Stanley, red-haired and tight-lipped, told me what she had on her mind: "You're going to kill Milton."

"What?"

"Just what I said, Kevin. You're going to kill Milton. I know he's coming over here tonight, and when he does you're going to give him a cup of coffee with a little of this in it." She took a small packet out of her purse. "And at eleven o'clock a mutual friend will drop by and pick him up."

"Mark Honig?"

"Yes, Mark." she said. "He owes me a favor."

"And why am I doing this?" I asked. "Murder *is* against the law, even in New York."

"So is bigamy, Kevin."

I felt the ends of my mouth twitch. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," said Mrs. Stanley. "I mean your wife and kid back in Fort Wayne. What do you suppose your chances of marrying the rich Susan would be if I sent her this family portrait?" She

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pulled out a photo Christmas card showing Dorothy, Melissa, and me smiling into the camera, little Melissa with her eyes closed from the flash. And in my handwriting—*To Milt and Jill from the Ivers Family.*

"How did you get this card?" I demanded, if it is possible to demand in a shaky voice.

"You sent it to us, two Christmases ago. Don't you remember?"

"But I don't even know you!"

She didn't answer but started glancing at some sample drawings on my desk. "Not bad," she said. "Maybe I'll get Roger to have you design a new trademark for the company after he takes over. The old one is so tacky."

She reached for the card. I held onto it. She smiled.

"Never mind. I have plenty of copies." She moved toward the door.

"Why pick on me?" I asked. "Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Oh, no," she said. "This way is much neater."

"But what if they catch me? They'll trace him to me!"

"How? You don't know him, remember?" She was overdoing that smile as she left.

Milton Stanley arrived a little after ten . . .

You know something? I don't answer junk mail any more.

"O"

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COUNTERFEIT FOR MURDER

by REX STOUT

(continued from page 56)

Raymond Dell's chin lifted another quarter of an inch. "We could all refuse," he said.

Wolfe nodded. "You could indeed. If you think that would serve your friend in whose debt you are. Shall I try the others?"

"No. As for that question, if Hattie is your client you could ask her. Perhaps you already have. I have paid no room rent for three years and she has asked for none."

Wolfe's head moved. "Miss Kirk?"

She was still staring at him. "The cops didn't ask me that," she said.

Wolfe grunted. "They have their technique and I have mine. That question applies to the problem as I see it. Does it embarrass you?"

"No. I have lived there nearly a year and I have paid five dollars every week."

"From current income?"

"I haven't any current income. I get a check from my father every month."

"I trust it doesn't embarrass him. Mr. Ferris?"

Noel Ferris passed his tongue over his lips. "How this applies is beyond me," he said, "but I don't dare to refuse to answer. I haven't figured how I stand on rent, but you can. I've had a room there for eighteen months. Last summer I was on television for thirteen weeks and I gave Hattie a hundred and fifty dollars. A show I was in flopped in November, and since then it has been television crumbs. Two weeks ago I gave her sixty dollars. You figure it."

"You're a hundred and eighty dollars short. Mr. Hannah?"

Paul Hannah was looking determined. "I'm not taking any dare," he blurted. "You may think your question applies, but I don't. You say you know one of us killed Tammy Baxter, but I don't believe it. I know damn well I didn't. You don't kill someone without a reason, and what was it? She had only been there three weeks and we barely knew her. The knife doesn't prove anything. Whoever killed her got in the house somehow, and if he was in the house he

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could have got the knife. I'm not taking any dare."

Wolfe shook his head. "Your spunk is impressive, Mr. Hannah, but it bounces off. If you are innocent the question whether you'll take a dare doesn't arise; the question is, what are you here for? To oblige a friend or parade your conceit?"

"I'm here because of what Hattie said to Martha and I wanted to hear what you had to say. And you ask if I've paid my room rent, for God's sake. All right, I have. I've been there four months and I've paid every week. That proves something?"

"Obviously. That you are not a pauper. You have an income?"

"No. I have money that I saved."

"So. That point is covered." Wolfe's eyes went to Martha. "Now, Miss Kirk, for what you have told the police—at least one detail. Your movements this morning, say from ten thirty until one o'clock. Where were you?"

"I was in my room," she said, "until about a quarter after twelve. The police wanted to know exactly, but I couldn't tell them. I got in late last night, and I always do exercises for an hour when I get up. About a quarter after twelve I went down to the kitchen. There were no oranges and I went out and got some. I wasn't gone more than ten minutes. I was cooking bacon and eggs when Mr. Dell came in, and Hattie with Mr. Goodwin, and Hattie said he was going to do a piece for a magazine, and—"

"That's far enough. Which room is yours?"

"The third floor front, above Hattie's."

"And the others? Their rooms?"

"Ray's is the second floor rear—Raymond Dell's. The rear room on my floor, the third, is Tammy Baxter's. The one above mine, on the fourth floor, is Noel Ferris's, and the rear one on that floor is Paul Hannah's."

"Did you see any of them this morning?"

"No. Not until Ray came to the kitchen, and that was afternoon."

"Did you hear any of them moving or speaking?"

"No."

"Not even Mr. Ferris in the room above you?"

"No. I suppose he was up and gone before I woke up."

"Did you hear or see anything at all that might be of significance?"

She shook her head. "The police thought I must have, when I was in the kitchen, but I didn't."

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Wolfe's head went left, to Raymond Dell in the red leather chair. "Mr. Dell. I know you came downstairs when Miss Annis entered the house with Mr. Goodwin shortly before one o'clock. Before that?"

"Nothing," Dell rumbled.

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. That was when I left my room for the first time. Until then I had seen no one, heard nothing, and seen nothing. I had been asleep."

"Then how did you know there were no oranges?"

Dell's chin jerked up. "What's that? Oh." He gestured. "That man Goodwin. I knew because there had been none when I went down for some in the early hours—the late hours. I don't sleep at night; I read. I was reading Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and when I finished it, at five o'clock perhaps, or six, I wanted oranges. I always do around that hour. Finding none, I returned to my room and finally dozed."

"So that was customary? You rarely stir before twelve?"

"I never do."

"And at night you read. How do you spend your afternoons?"

Dell frowned. "Could that conceivably apply?"

"Yes. Conceivably."

"I want to be present when you apply it. That would be a revelation worthy of the Cumaean sybil. I baby-sit."

"You what?"

"The current abhorrent term is 'baby-sit.' I have a friend who is a painter, by name Max Eder, who lives in an East Side tenement. His wife is dead. He has a son and daughter aged three and four, and five days a week I am their keeper for five hours, from two till seven. For a stipend. Mondays and Tuesdays I am free to roam the market if I am so inclined. You frown. To offer my talents in television dens. I am so inclined only by necessity."

"What is Mr. Eder's address?"

Dell shrugged, an actor's shrug. "This approaches lunacy. However, it's in the phone book. Three-fourteen Mission Street."

"How long have you been—uh—performing this service for him?"

"Something over a year."

Wolfe left him. "Mr. Hannah. Since I am now merely asking for what you have already told the police, your whereabouts today from ten thirty to one, I hope you won't be provoked."

"You do like hell," Hannah blurted. "Parading my conceit, huh? I'm sticking only because I told Martha I would. I left the

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house a little after nine o'clock and spent a couple of hours around the West Side docks, and then I took a bus downtown and got to the Mushroom Theater a little before twelve. We start rehearsal at noon. Around two o'clock a man came and flashed a badge and said I was wanted for questioning and took me to Forty-seventh Street."

"What were you doing around the docks?"

"I was looking and listening. In the play we're doing, *Do As Thou Wilt*, I'm a longshoreman, and I want to get it right."

"Where is the Mushroom Theater?"

"Bowie Street. Near Houston Street."

"Do you have a leading role in the play?"

"No. Not leading."

"How many lines have you?"

"Not many. It's not a big part. I'm young and I'm learning."

"How long have you been rehearsing?"

"About a month."

"Have you appeared at that theater before?"

"Once, last fall. I had a walk-on in *The Pleasure Is Mine*."

"How long did it run?"

"Six weeks. Pretty good for off-Broadway."

"Do you favor any particular spot when you visit the docks?"

"No. I just move around and look and listen."

"Do you do that every day?"

"Hell, no."

"How many times in the past month?"

"Only once before today. A couple of times when I got the part, in November."

I was thinking that at least he had one of the basic qualifications for an actor. He was ready and willing to answer any and all questions about his career, with or without a dare, whether they applied or not. If Wolfe thought it would help to have the plot of *Do As Thou Wilt* described in detail, all he had to do was ask.

But apparently he didn't need it. His head moved. "And you, Mr. Ferris?"

"I'm feeling a lot better," Noel Ferris said. "When the questions they asked made me realize that I was actually suspected of murder, and I also realized that I had no alibi, it looked pretty dark. Believe me. What if the others had all been somewhere else and could prove it? So I thank you, Mr. Wolfe. I feel a lot better. As for me, I left the house a little after ten and called at four agencies. Two of them would remember I was there, but probably not the

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exact time. When I got hungry I went back to the house to eat. I can't afford five-dollar lunches, and I can't eat eight-cent ones. When I entered the house a man was at the phone telling someone that Tammy Baxter had been murdered and her body was in the parlor."

"What kind of agencies?"

"Casting. Theater and television."

"Do you visit them daily?"

"No. About twice a week."

"And the other five days? How do you pass the time?"

"I don't. It passes me. Two days, sometimes three, I make horses and kangaroos and other animals. I go to a workroom and model them and make molds. Something on the order of Cellini. I get eight dollars for a squirrel. Twenty for a giraffe."

"Where is the workroom?"

"In the rear of a shop on First Avenue. The name of the shop is Harry's Zoo. The name of the owner is Harry Arkazy. He has a sixteen-year-old daughter as beautiful as a rosy dawn, but she lisps. Her name is Ilonka. His son's name—"

"This is not a comedy, Mr. Ferris," Wolfe snapped. He twisted his neck to look at the wall clock. "I engaged to act for Miss Annis only five hours ago and I haven't arranged my mind, so my questions may be at random, but they are not frivolous." His eyes moved to take them in. "Now that I have seen you and heard you I am better prepared, and I can consider how to proceed. I will leave it to Miss Annis to thank you—three of you—for coming." He arose. "I expect to see you again."

Martha was gawking at him. "But Hattie said to tell you everything we told the cops!"

He nodded. "I know. It would take all night. I'll go to that extreme only by compulsion; and if you told them anything indicative they are hours ahead of me and I would only breathe their dust."

Dell boomed. "You call this investigating a murder? Asking me if I had paid my room rent and how I spend my afternoons?"

It *was* a little odd, the four suspects coming uninvited to empty the bag and being told to go almost before they got started. Noel Ferris, his lip twisted, got up and headed for the hall. Martha Kirk, getting no satisfaction from Wolfe, appealed to me: didn't I realize that Hattie had been arrested for a murder she didn't commit? Paul Hannah sat and listened to us, chewing his lip, then got up and touched her arm and said they might as well go. Raymond Dell stood,

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lowered his chin, gazed at Wolfe half a minute, registering indignation, wheeled, and marched out. (Exit Dell, center.)

I followed Martha and Hannah to the hall, but she preferred to put on her galoshes herself. When I opened the door for them a few snowflakes danced in.

Back in the office, Wolfe was sitting again, leaning back with his eyes closed. I asked if he wanted beer, got a nod, and went to the kitchen and brought a bottle and glass, and a glass of milk for me. He opened his eyes, took in a bushel of air through his nose and let it out through his mouth, straightened up, picked up the bottle, and poured.

He spoke. "Saul and Fred and Orrie. At eight in the morning in my room."

My brows went up. Saul Panzer is the best operative south of the North Pole. His rate is ten dollars an hour and he is worth twenty. Fred Durkin's rate is seven dollars and he is worth seven-fifty. Orrie Cather's rate is also seven dollars and he is worth six-fifty.

"Oh." I took a sip of milk. "Then you did get an inkling?"

"I got a conclusion: that it would be futile to go on pecking at them. Mr. Leach has been on their flanks for three weeks, and now Mr. Cramer's army has them under siege. My only chance of priority is to surprise him from the rear."

The foam was down to the rim of his glass, and he lifted it and drank, a healthy gulp. "It's a forlorn chance, certainly, but it's worth trying for want of a better. I am not familiar with the procedures of counterfeiters, but it seems unlikely that an underling would be entrusted with five hundred twenty-dollar bills. Ten thousand dollars. We know he had that large supply; and that permits the conjecture that his connection may be not with a mere go-between, but with the source. If so, the quickest way to settle it would be to locate the source."

"Yeah. It's barely possible that Leach has had that idea."

"No doubt. I assume that when Miss Baxter took a room in that house her primary mission was to search the premises for counterfeiting equipment. Obviously she found none. I also assume that, as you suggested, it was known that one of the inhabitants of that house had passed counterfeit money, but it was not known which one, and they were all under surveillance—by Miss Baxter in the house and by others outside. And if I were a Secret Service agent assigned to

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keep an eye on Raymond Dell I would suppose that any meeting he had with a supplier of contraband would be clandestine. That is how my mind would work. The first day I followed him to an East Side tenement I would of course make inquiries, with due caution, but when he went there five days a week and I learned from Miss Baxter what he did there, my attention would be diverted.

"But I am not a Secret Service agent. My attention is drawn to that tenement house, and specifically to Max Eder, a painter. An artist. I shall send Orrie Cather there tomorrow morning to reconnoiter. Fred Durkin will go to the shop on First Avenue—by the way, I want its address. Harry's Zoo." He made a face. "Saul Panzer will go to the Mushroom Theater. As I said, it's a forlorn chance, but what better can we do with tomorrow? Unless you have a suggestion?"

"I have," I said emphatically. "I respectfully suggest that you start thinking up something for day after tomorrow."

He grunted. He picked up his glass, took a gulp of beer, swallowed it, licked his lips, and put the glass down. "'Forlorn' was too strong a word," he said. "I have an expectation that is not wholly unreasonable. Twelve hours of the time of those three men plus expenses comes to more than three hundred dollars. I don't hazard that amount, even of a client's money, on a pig in a poke."

"Then you did get an inkling."

"Certainly."

"Fine. I hope it's not counterfeit." I swiveled and got the phone and dialed Saul Panzer's number.

I was there at the beginning of the briefing session in Wolfe's bedroom at eight o'clock Tuesday morning, but when the phone interrupted us a second time, Wolfe told me to go down to the office and take it there. The first time it was a *Times* reporter wanting to speak with Wolfe, and when I told him Wolfe was busy and would I do, he said no and hung up. The second call, which I took in the office, was from Lon Cohen of the *Gazette*, who preferred me to Wolfe any day. He wanted to know when he could send a photographer to take a picture of the dirt that Wolfe was going to feed the cops. Evidently one of the two who had carried Hattie out knew a newspaperman. Lon had other questions, naturally, but I told him the answers would have to wait until I found out what they were.

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I was considering whether to rejoin the briefing session when the phone rang again. It was Nathaniel Parker. He was sorry he hadn't been able to spring our client, but it had taken him three hours to find out where she was, and he hadn't got to see her until midnight. He expected to have her out by noon.

At nine o'clock the trio came down. One of the reasons they are better than most is that none of them looks it. Saul Panzer, undersized and wiry, with a big nose, could be a hackie. Fred Durkin, broad and burly and bald, could be a piano mover. Orrie Cather, tall and trim and dressy, could be an automobile salesman. They stepped into the office, and Saul said they had been told to take $300 apiece in used bills. I said as I went to open the safe that even with inflation and even with janitors promoted to building superintendents, fifty bucks was the top price for one, and they would please return the change. Orrie said that if they had to buy clerks and elevator men and neighbors there wouldn't be any change. Saul said they would each give me a ring every couple of hours or so.

When they had gone I went on with the morning chores—opening the mail, dusting the desks, filing the cards of propagation and performance records which Theodore puts on my desk every evening. That was just for my hands and eyes; my mind was busy with something else. Of all the things I do to earn my pay, from sharpening pencils to jumping a visitor before he can get his gun up, the most important is riding Wolfe, and he knows it. Sometimes it's next to impossible to tell whether he's working or only pretending to. That was the question that morning. If he was only stalling, if he had sent for Saul and Fred and Orrie just to keep from starting his brain going, the thing for me to do was to go up to the plant rooms and go to work on him. It was the same old problem, and the trouble was that I would have nothing to say when he narrowed his eyes at me, as he would, and inquired coldly, "What would you suggest?"

That was what my mind was on, and was still on when the doorbell rang a little after ten o'clock and I went to the hall for a look. It was Albert Leach, with his snap-brim hat down even closer to his ears than yesterday. I went and opened the door.

"Good morning," he said, and slipped his hand inside his overcoat.

I supposed he was producing

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his credentials. "Don't bother," I said, "I recognize you."

But it wasn't credentials. His hand came out with a folded paper. Extending it, he said, "Order of the Federal District Court."

I took it, unfolded it, and read it through. "You know," I said, "this is a new experience. I can't remember that we have ever been served with an order from a Federal court. Mr. Wolfe will be glad to add it to his collection." I stuck it in my pocket.

"You note," he said, "that I am empowered to search for the object specified if necessary."

"You won't have to. You heard me tell Cramer yesterday that I put it in the safe, and it's still there. Come in." I gave him room.

He had excellent manners. He entered, removed his hat, stood while I shut the door, and followed me to the office. I swung the safe door open, got a corner of the wrapping paper with my thumb and forefinger, carried it dangling, put it on my desk, and went back and brought the lettuce and the string. "There you are," I said. "I didn't rewrap it after I lifted the prints."

His lips tightened. "You said nothing to Inspector Cramer about lifting prints."

"No? I thought I had. Of course that was routine after Miss Annis told us how and where she found it. You won't find any except hers and mine. I couldn't, and I was pretty thorough."

"You tampered with evidence."

"What was it evidence of—then?" My feelings were hurt. "Anyway, the prints are still there. I'll give you a bag to carry it in, but first we'll have to count it and I want a receipt. It's still the property of Miss Hattie Annis."

He opened his mouth and closed it again. It was a situation. He knew that I knew that he knew that I knew it was counterfeit, and therefore we both knew that Hattie would never see it again, but he was still keeping it off the record. "I'll make a concession," I offered. "We'll weigh it on the postal scale. Put it on."

He picked it up and put it on the scale, and we looked. Just under seventeen ounces. I brought a shopping bag from the kitchen and gave it to him, got at the typewriter, and tapped out a receipt for 16-11/12 oz. of twenty-dollar bills. I was tempted to add "in good condition," but remember that he had warned me not to try any fancy tricks with the Secret Service. As I handed him

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the receipt and my pen the doorbell rang, and I stepped to the hall.

It was Inspector Cramer. I went and opened the door. He entered. I shut the door. When I turned, his hand was emerging from inside his coat with a folded paper. He handed it to me. I read it through. It wouldn't be worth keeping as a souvenir—just the State of New York.

"You'll notice," he said, "that I can search for it if I have to."

"You won't have to. You know where it is."

He strode to the office door and on in. I stopped on the sill. Leach, at my desk, with the shopping bag in one hand and the bills in the other, turned.

"It's a problem," I said. "Leach has signed a receipt for it, but I can tear it up. Why don't you split it half and half?"

Cramer stood at arm's length from the T-man. A muscle in the side of his neck was twitching. "That's evidence in a murder case," he said. "I have a court order for it."

"So have I," Leach said. "From a Federal court." He put the bills in the bag, taking his time, and tucked the bag under his arm. "If you'll send a man to our office he'll be allowed to examine it, Inspector. We are always ready to cooperate with the local authorities."

He moved, detouring around Cramer. Cramer wheeled and followed him, and I stepped aside to let them by. As Cramer passed he gave me a glare that would have withered a lesser man. I didn't cooperate by going to open the door because I wasn't sure I could keep my face straight, and when they were out and the door had closed I quit trying. A whoop had wanted out the second Cramer produced the paper, and now I let it come. I laughed so loud and so long that Fritz appeared at the kitchen door to ask what had happened.

There was no point in disturbing Wolfe in the plant rooms, so I let it wait until he came down at eleven o'clock. He never whoops, but when I reported and showed him the court orders he allowed himself an all-out chuckle and there was a twinkle in his eye. He said it was just as well he hadn't been present, since Cramer would probably have accused him of staging it, and I agreed. I said I was glad the stuff was out of the house, and he agreed.

Calls came from Saul and Fred and Orrie during the next half-hour. Nothing promising. Orrie had spoken with Max Eder, the janitor of the building, and three other

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tenants. Fred had bought a squirrel and a kangaroo and had spent an hour in the workroom in the rear of the shop. Saul hadn't been inside the building that contained the Mushroom Theater. From the outside it looked as if it might collapse if you leaned against it. He had spent the two hours covering the neighborhood.

When I relayed the reports to Wolfe, who was doing a crossword puzzle in the *London Observer*, all I got was a grunt. I had about decided that it was time to go to work on him when the doorbell rang and I went to answer it.

It was our lawyer and our client. I hadn't told him to bring her. I was in no mood for her, and Wolfe certainly wasn't. All I could tell her was that Wolfe either had an inkling or hadn't, and he was spending her money at the rate of fifty bucks an hour. I went and opened the door but occupied the threshold.

"Greetings," I said heartily. "This is a relief! I'm sorry we couldn't make it sooner, Hattie, but Mr. Parker did his best. You'll take her home, Nat? I'm tied up here."

"Don't call me Hattie," she said, "until I find what you're up to."

"I brought her here," Parker said, "because she insisted." He looked harassed. "I'll be going. I've canceled two appointments and I'm late for another one." He went.

"Every time I come here," Hattie said, "there you stand. What good does it do to open the door if you fill it up?"

I stood aside and she entered. She took off the gray woolen gloves and stuck them in her coat pocket, and unbuttoned her coat. I certainly would have been no good if I hadn't helped her off with the coat, so I did, and put it on a hanger. By the time I had it on the rack she was at the office door, entering, and by the time I got to the office she was in the red leather chair and Wolfe was glowering at her.

"About that lawyer," she said. "I'm not going to pay him too, and I told him so. When I told Buster I could pay forty-two thousand dollars that includes everything."

Wolfe looked at me. I nodded. "All right. I told you I was under a spell. I scaled it down."

He looked at her. "Very well, madam, I'll pay the lawyer. You came to tell me that?"

"I told you before not to madam me. First I want to see that counterfeit money, then I'll know I can trust you. Show it to me."

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Wolfe looked at me. I have seen him handle many a crisis, but that was too tough for him. "Archie?" he said.

I opened my desk drawer, took out three sheets of paper, and went and handed her one of them. "A cop named Cramer brought that," I said. "Signed by a judge, ordering us to give him the bills and the wrapper. Cramer knows Mr. Wolfe and me and doesn't like us. When he handed me that he sneered."

"I thought so. You're no good. So you—"

"Wait a minute. We had been afraid that would happen. The cop was too late." I handed her another paper. "A man had already come with that, signed by a Federal judge, and I had turned the money over to him, so the cop was out of luck. I don't say we had arranged it, but facts are facts. The cop was so sore he marched out without a word." I handed her the third paper. "That's the receipt the man signed."

She hadn't even glanced at any of the documents. She handed them back. "I wish I had been here," she said.

"So do I, Miss Annis. You would have enjoyed it."

"Call me Hattie."

"With pleasure." I returned the papers to the drawer and sat. "Did you have a hard night?"

"Not too hard. There was a couch and I got some naps, but the woman that stayed with me wouldn't turn the lights out, and every two hours they came back and started in again. Cops are too mean to live, and they're too dumb. They might have known I wouldn't speak to a cop."

"Didn't you speak at all?"

"No. Didn't I say I wouldn't?"

"Not a word?"

"No. The worst part was I was hungry. They brought some stuff twice last night and again this morning, but of course I wouldn't touch it. I don't know what kind of drug they had in it, something to make me talk."

"You haven't eaten at all?"

"Of course not."

Wolfe grunted. "That's ridiculous. We have a spare room that is comfortable. Mr. Goodwin will take you to it, and my chef will take you a tray. After your fast you should eat with caution. Have you a preference?"

She cocked her head. "You bet I have, Falstaff. Let the lady enjoy herself. I know about your chef. How about some lamb kidneys *bourguignonne?*"

Wolfe doesn't flabbergast easy, but that did it. "That would take time, mad—Miss Annis. At least two hours."

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"I don't mind, I'll take a nap. Is there a bathroom?"

"Certainly."

"Then I can wash the smell of the cops off. But the other thing I want to know, what about the reward? We want that reward."

"That's problematical. I'll keep it in mind. We have a more urgent matter to deal with. After you are refreshed—"

"What matter?"

"The job you hired me for. Investigation of the murder committed in your house."

"I hired you to make the cops eat dirt, and you already have. The one named Cramer, is he a big one with a big red face and little blue eyes like a pig?"

"Pigs' eyes are not blue. Otherwise the description fits."

"Then you've already made him eat dirt. I wish I had been here. He was the first one in my room when they busted the door. That's part of your job, to make them pay for that door. The murder, that's their job. I'm surprised it was Tammy Baxter because I thought a counterfeiter would have more clothes, but of course when somebody came for the package and it wasn't there he thought she had taken it and he killed her, but she should have known I had it because I told her yesterday morning—"

The phone rang and I swiveled and got it. A female said that Mr. Mandel wanted to speak to me, and after a wait he came on.

"Goodwin? Mandel of the District Attorney's office. I want to see you. How soon can you be here?"

"Twenty minutes. If necessary."

"It's necessary. It's ten minutes past twelve. I'll expect you at twelve thirty. Right?"

I told him yes, traffic permitting, hung up, and arose. "The D.A.'s office," I announced. "I'm surprised it didn't come sooner. You don't need me anyway, you understand each other so well."

I left them.

They kept me at 155 Leonard Street five and a half hours. All I got out of it was two corned beef sandwiches, a piece of blueberry pie, and two glasses of milk, on the house, eaten at the desk of Assistant D.A. Mandel. What they got out of it was doubtful. In addition to Mandel, I had conversations with another Assistant D.A. named Lindstrom, two detectives attached to the D.A.'s office, and District Attorney Macklin himself.

Over the years I have been suspected of a lot of things by various authorities, from cor-

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rupting a cop by buying him a drink to complicity in a murder, and that day they added a new one to the list. None of them came right out with it, but what was really biting them was their suspicion that I was in collusion with the United States government.

Of course they covered other aspects of the case, all of them and thoroughly, but what they concentrated on was the package of phony lettuce. That was all the D.A. himself asked me about, and he put it to me point-blank: did I know the money was counterfeit? I told him point-blank no, and felt better; it's always a relief to get a lie off your chest. He said of course I was lying, that I would have been a nitwit not to suspect it. I said it didn't matter now anyway, since the Secret Service had it, and he blew his top.

I admit it's hard to believe that he actually thought I had disposed of evidence in a murder case by arranging for Leach to beat Cramer to it, but I suppose a D.A. has as much right to be a damfool as the people who voted for him.

It was a quarter past six when I left the building and flagged a taxi. By the time it turned into 35th Street I had decided that I wouldn't wait until after dinner to go for Wolfe. He was too darned lazy to live. Since, thanks to me, Hattie had told him that he had already made Cramer eat dirt, he would consider that no matter what happened or didn't happen he could send her a bill for a modest hunk of the forty-two thousand, say five grand, and why should he strain his brain? She was out on bail as a material witness and in no real danger. We had got rid of the contraband. There was no great hurry. Nuts, I decided. He had to be poked. As I mounted the stoop and put my key in the door I was choosing my opening remark from three I had hatched.

But I didn't get to use it. The rack in the hall was so crowded with coats that I had to squeeze mine between two that I recognized—Inspector Cramer's and Saul Panzer's. Cramer's voice was raised in the office, and it was hoarse, as it always was when he was in a huff. As I reached the office door he was saying, "—not just to hear you spout! If you've got something let's have it!"

Wolfe, seated behind his desk with his fingers laced at the summit of his middle mound, had sent his eyes to me. "Ah," he said. "Satisfactory. I was concerned."

Sure he was. The bigger the audience the better when he is

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staging a scene. Before I headed for my desk I glanced around: Cramer in the red leather chair, Sergeant Stebbins at his right; Paul Hannah and Noel Ferris on chairs facing Wolfe's desk; Raymond Dell and Albert Leach, the T-man, behind them; and Martha Kirk and Hattie Annis on the couch to the left of my desk. Saul Panzer was over by the big globe. As I circled around Leach and Dell, Wolfe was speaking.

"You know quite well I have something, Mr. Cramer, or you wouldn't have come. As I told you on the phone I had a stroke of luck, but I had invited it; and I knew where to send the invitation. True, I sent it to three addresses—an East Side tenement, a shop on First Avenue, and a building on Bowie Street which housed the theater—but my expectation was centered on the last.

"When my expectation was realized I was faced with the question whether to notify you or to notify Mr. Leach; and preferring not to choose, I asked you both to come and to bring Miss Kirk, Mr. Dell, Mr. Ferris, and Mr. Hannah. Miss Annis, my client, was here. I thought the first three had a right to be present; as for Mr. Hannah, since he is both a counterfeiter and a murderer, you and Mr. Leach will—"

"That's a lie," Hannah said, and was rising, but Leach, behind him, grabbed his arm. Hannah jerked, but Leach held on. "Who the hell are you?" Hannah demanded, and with his free hand Leach got his leather fold from his pocket and flipped it open, and by then Stebbins was there.

"Are you arresting him?" Stebbins asked.

"No, are you?" Leach asked.

"Nobody's arresting me," Hannah said.

"Sit down, Hannah," Cramer growled. He looked at Wolfe. He had seen Wolfe perform before, and Leach hadn't. Not only had he heard Wolfe say that Hannah was a counterfeiter and a murderer, but also he saw the expression on Wolfe's face, and he certainly knew that face. He left his chair, put his hand on Hannah's shoulder, and said, "You're under arrest as a material witness in the murder of Tamaris Baxter. All right, Sergeant," and returned to his chair. Stebbins stood at Hannah's left and Leach stood at his right.

"That's prudent, Mr. Cramer," Wolfe said, "since I have no conclusive evidence. Up to three hours ago I had merely a surmise. Talking with these people last evening, I got nothing but faint intimations. Miss Kirk? Unlikely. She

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attended a ballet school regularly, she exercised an hour every morning, and she received a monthly remittance from her father, all of which could be checked. Mr. Dell? Also unlikely. He had paid no room rent for three years. Mr. Ferris? Possibly, but with a reservation. His statement that two of the agencies he called at yesterday would corroborate him made it improbable that he had followed Miss Annis here yesterday morning."

"So what?" Cramer rasped.

"So my attention centered on Mr. Hannah. He had lived there only four months. He had paid for his room every week. He had almost certainly lied when he said Miss Baxter had told him that a man had twice followed her to the door. Miss Baxter was an agent of the Secret Service of the Treasury Department, and she—"

"Who said so?" Leach demanded.

"No one. Mr. Goodwin inferred it. You have carried discretion to an extreme, Mr. Leach, in concealing the interest of your organization in the occupants of that house, but you will soon agree that it is no longer needed. So I did not believe Miss Baxter had told Mr. Hannah that. Finally, Mr. Hannah's account of his movements yesterday left him completely free up to noon. He could have followed Miss Annis here and, when she left without entering, back to her house. He could have stolen a parked car and, when she left her house a second time, tried to run it over her; but, since he failed, that is of little consequence."

"There's damn little consequence in anything you've said," Cramer growled.

Wolfe nodded. "I'm only explaining why my attention centered on Mr. Hannah. I could indulge in speculation—for instance, why did he kill Miss Baxter there and then? Had she seen him try to kill Miss Annis with the car, and confronted him when he returned to the house? But you can speculate as well as I, and it will be your job, not mine, to screw a confession out of him."

"I've got nothing to confess," Hannah said. "You're going to regret this. You're going to regret it good."

"I think not, Mr. Hannah." Wolfe's eyes went to Leach, standing, and then to Cramer, sitting. "So when I sent three men to those addresses, with the invitations to luck, I sent Saul Panzer to the Mushroom. Mr. Panzer leaves less to luck than any man I know. He phoned four times to report progress. The third time, around three o'clock, he asked

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for reinforcements and I sent them. The fourth time, less than two hours ago, I told him to come and I phoned you gentlemen. Saul, will you describe the situation?"

Since Saul was over by the big globe, all but Wolfe and Stebbins and me had to twist their necks. "Just the situation?" Saul asked.

"Lead up to it briefly."

"Yes, sir. The first two hours I covered the neighborhood, but got no lead, so I went inside the building. I didn't tell the superintendent what I was after, just that I wanted to look around for something, and the way he reacted and the way he accepted forty dollars for his trouble, I decided he was honest. He showed me around the theater and the basement and the second floor. The third floor is occupied by a job-printing shop with two presses and the other equipment you would expect. He told the two men there what I had suggested, that I was an insurance underwriters' inspector looking for violations.

"From the way the men looked I decided I was hot, and I told the superintendent I would have to give the shop a good look and it would take a while, and he left. When I started looking behind things on shelves they jumped me and I had to get rough and pull my gun. I didn't shoot, but I had to knock one of them out. There was a phone on a table, and I rang you and asked you to send Fred and Orrie to help me search the place. You said they would be calling in soon, and you would—"

"That's far enough," Wolfe said. "And now?"

"They're still there. In behind stacks of paper on one of the shelves there are eight stacks of new twenty-dollar bills. In a compartment in the back of a cupboard are four engraver's plates that were probably used to make the bills. The two men are on the floor with their hands and feet tied. I don't know their names. There's only one chair in the room and Fred Durkin is sitting on it, or he was when I left, and Orrie Cather was sitting on a pile of paper. One of the men has a lump on the side of his head where I hit him with my gun, but he's not hurt much. I gave the superintendent another twenty dollars. That's the situation."

Paul Hannah had started to rise, but hands on his shoulders had stopped him—Stebbins on the left and Leach on the right.

"You might add one detail," Wolfe told Saul. "The name one of them mentioned."

"Yes, sir. That was after Fred and Orrie came and we

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had them tied and we found the plates. One of them said to the other one, 'I told you Paul would squeal. I told you we ought to clear out.' Do you want the rest of it?"

"That will do for now. You will of course report in full to Mr. Cramer and Mr. Leach." Wolfe's head moved. "As you see, gentlemen, I was faced with a dilemma, since he was both a counterfeiter and a murderer. Preferring not to choose, I asked you both to come, and I leave the question of priority to you. Since Mr. Cramer has him under arrest—"

The movement that interrupted him was by Paul Hannah, but it wasn't much of a movement. Apparently his idea was to lunge at Wolfe, but Stebbins and Leach had him pinned. They glared at each other and Hannah glared at Wolfe, and Hattie Annis' voice came from the couch.

"You see, Falstaff? Didn't I tell you?"

She had told him absolutely nothing.

One day three weeks later Wolfe and I were in the office disagreeing about something when the doorbell rang. It was Hattie. I escorted her in, and she sat in the red leather chair, opened her handbag, and took out a little package wrapped in brown paper. Wolfe made a face. I thought, Good Lord, she's found another one. But she reached into the bag again and came out with an envelope that I recognized.

"This check you sent me," she said. "You say in your letter it's for my share of the reward, a hundred dollars. So you kept your share?"

"Yes," Wolfe lied.

"Did you get yours, Buster?"

"Yes," I lied.

"Then that's all right. But what about this bill? Five thousand dollars' fee for services and $621.65 for expenses. What did I tell you that day, Buster? Didn't I say I could pay forty-two thousand dollars?"

"You did."

"Then here it is." She tossed the package onto Wolfe's desk. "A man at the bank helped me pick those bonds and he says there's none better. These are transferred to you. This is the first time I ever let any of them go, and I hope it's the last, but it was worth it. That was a day—the best day I've had since my father died. I didn't like it when I saw in the paper that he had confessed, but that wasn't your fault. I've got no use for anybody that confesses anything to the cops.

"That Paul Hannah was no good. He even told them how

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he stole the car and tried to kill me with it because he thought I had the package and knew who put it in my parlor, and he saw Tammy across the street and knew she saw him, and when he went back to the house she was at the phone dialing a number and he got the knife from the kitchen, and when he got near her and she stood up he stabbed her, and then he carried her in the parlor and left her there with her skirt up to her waist. He was no good. I'll have to be more careful about people that want a room."

Wolfe was frowning. "I can't accept those bonds, mad—Miss Annis. Not all of them. I prefer to evaluate my services myself I did so and sent you a bill."

She nodded. "I tore it up. The day I told Buster that, that settled it. I hired you and I said what I could pay. Now you say you won't accept it. That's no way to do."

Wolfe looked at me. I grinned. He pushed his chair back and arose. "I have a matter to attend to," he said. "I'll leave you with Mr. Goodwin. You understand each other." He marched out.

It took me half an hour to talk her around, and she told me twice not to call her Hattie.

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"He had been drunk when he left the party. They had pressed him to stay for one more, and for several after that . ." A hit-and-run story you won't soon forget . . .

TURNPIKE ROULETTE

by HENRY T. PARRY

He hit the brakes, swung the wheel violently, and brought the car to a shuddering stall on the turnpike shoulder. The huge tractor-trailer moved forward after its sudden, unexpected stop, massively indifferent to the near miss. Its rear doors, with their flame-shaped lettering spelling out the trucker's name, T. I. Siphone, receded into the night.

When his sense of shock subsided he tried to reconstruct how he had permitted himself to follow the truck so closely and what had caused the truck to make its abrupt, unsignaled stop on an empty road at two in the morning. He pressed his forehead against the wheel and sorted out the emotional stresses that wrung him: fright over this near accident, depression from the liquor he had drunk late that afternoon, and, overriding all else, guilt. . .

He had been drunk when he left the party. They had pressed him to stay for one more, and for several after that, and he had stayed, putting out of his mind the long drive on the turnpike back to the city. Business drinking, he had thought—how many years of it and when am I going to quit? He wished he were back in engineering where the people had substance and knew what they were talking about. But it had been a profitable day, more profitable than months of engineering, and he knew from long experience that closing this kind of deal with this kind of people always ended in prolonged drinking.

It had already been dark when he finally got away, telling himself that his driving would be all right if he were extremely cautious. Take a chance one more time. Always been lucky.

Near the edge of town the street had run through the college community. In the early

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darkness the green of the traffic lights had looked false and synthetic against the heavy maple foliage. He had forgotten to switch on his lights and his eyes focused with difficulty on the dim street. As he shifted his foot from brake to accelerator to brake, he felt the dreamlike resistance of limbs moving submerged.

If I had any sense, he had told himself, I'd hole up in the next motel until morning. But tomorrow I must be in the home office, if for no other reason than to tell them how much of an increase in commission I have a right to expect for closing this contract. He slid into a fantasy of tomorrow's scene when he would relate today's success.

Then a book had whirled upward over the hood, its pages flattened, and slid down the windshield and cart-wheeled into the street. The body had jackknifed on his right-front fender, suspended itself for a moment in the arms-flung spread of a gored matador, and bounced upward and outward, a bow wave of glasses, white shirt front, and shocked flesh. The sound of the impact was, he thought, surprisingly metallic.

Mechanically he had pulled over toward the curb but before he stopped, his instinct warned him against getting involved. Whatever was done, was done and he could not undo it. Get away now and no one would ever know. His foot, released from the lethargy of alcohol, jerked down on the accelerator and he had fled mindlessly. His rear-view mirror showed the street dark and empty under the maples.

After a few blocks he had slowed and turned off the main avenue, driving through local streets that became grubbier with gas stations and neon signs. At a seamy main thoroughfare where he waited to edge into the turnpike-bound traffic, he saw a traveling red arrow flitting downward toward the neon words: *Car Wash.* Dents and fender damage would be easier to explain than other more explicit, more ugly evidence that might be clinging to the car.

He had turned into the driveway of the car wash and stopped, but he could not bring himself to get out and inspect the fender. Rolling down the window, he had paid the attendant and moved forward into the automatic washer. He felt the car being seized underneath by steel claws, losing its independent mobility, and being drawn strongly and inexorably into the swirling shower where huge brushes

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scrubbed in a soapy spray. He had the impression of being dragged along some foreordained course to an end that he was powerless to avoid.

Imprisoned in the bubble of the vehicle, its windows obscured by the swirling water, he had a sudden spurt of claustrophobic fear. He clung to the wheel, afraid to close his eyes lest he should lapse into unconsciousness, and had hung on until the car slowly emerged, shining and dripping, into the glare of the floodlights.

As he felt the mechanism release the car he had a momentary sense of freedom and cleansing. It had never happened. He was not a hit-and-run driver. He had not been drinking. He had just left the others, having refused even "one for the road," and the events that were fated to come had been canceled. The palpable physical weight of guilt that had settled on his shoulders like a full pack had lifted.

"Geddid owda heah," the attendant had mumbled and gestured through the dripping window. His glimmer of instant absolution vanished.

He had driven back to the street and as he waited to insert himself into a gap in the traffic, the thought came: It's not too late. Turn left here when the light changes, go back to the center of town, and report it to the police. The elapsed time since the incident was short and the difficulty a stranger would have in finding the police station would explain the delay. But he had not stopped to help. Again, he might explain: the shock, the confusion.

But how could he explain the hard fact of his drinking? The police would listen to his explanations and noncommittally book him for drunken driving and leaving the scene of an accident. And possibly for manslaughter.

In the street the light changed; the lanes both left and right were clear for turning in either direction—left into town and endless trouble, or right to the turnpike and non-involvement. He had moved out into the street, turned right, and driven out of town.

An hour later he had pulled off the highway into a motel near the turnpike entrance. He parked under a writhing *Vacancy* sign, jolting the car to a stop against a concrete bolster. With both hands he guided the key into the lock of the trunk and jostled his bag out, carefully avoiding even a glance at the front of the car.

He entered a peeling structure marked *Office* and waited before the cigarette-charred

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formica counter while somewhere in the domestic quarters to the rear a man and woman quarreled over money. The argument stopped abruptly and a thin-mouthed man with eyes that had suspiciously scanned hundreds of night-journeying people appeared and shoved a registration card across the counter. He had filled in the name of a teacher he'd hated as a child and entered the incorrect state and registration of his car, knowing that no one ever bothered to check.

"Pay now, mister."

He pawed for his wallet, dropped it, and in picking it up dropped the room key. Each time he straightened up he felt consciousness swim away in a drunken haze. Fighting off the rising blackness, he crossed the parking lot and after much fumbling unlocked the door of his room. Without turning on the light to reveal the orderly uncleanliness of his plastic-ridden room, he had dropped face down on the bed, fully clothed, and fallen headlong into an alcoholic maelstrom.

Four hours later he had awakened in the grip of the insomnia of alcohol, his head pounding and his mouth parched. He groped in the darkness and turned on the bedside radio.

"... indicated that retaliations will be forthcoming if such barbarous incidents were to continue."

The announcer went on, "Dr. Thomas McAllister was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver early this evening while crossing University Avenue. He was on his way to attend a dinner in honor of his forty-two years of teaching in the Classics Department of the University. As news of the incident spread through the university community, hundreds of students, faculty, and townspeople gathered at the hospital where Dr. McAllister died an hour after being admitted.

"Dr. McAllister was widely known in his field, not only for his teaching—he was four times given the coveted award of Best Teacher—but also for his extensive writing in the field of classical studies, a subject to which he had devoted his entire professional life. His special concern was the religion of the early Greek city states. Of his writing, tomorrow's *Times* will say . . ."

He had tried not to listen to the remainder of the announcement but could not bring himself to take a positive action that would cut himself off from the details. The announcer's voice drilled into his head and even though he tried not to

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hear, he knew that every word lodged solidly in his consciousness and would rise to accuse him. Behind his closed eyes he once again saw the book spinning through the dusk, once again felt the impact of metal on flesh.

He undressed, stood under the cold shower, and then dressed, being careful to wear nothing that he had worn at the time of the incident—not that he thought his clothes would present any incriminating data but rather with the feeling of a symbolic casting-off of guilt. He clicked the door of the room shut behind him and, resisting an impulse to tiptoe, had crossed the gravel strip to the parking lot where a few cars huddled in the harsh lights, furtive and shamed. He inspected the right-front fender but found no trace of impact; the headlight and the chrome work glittered under the chill neons overhead.

An unreasonable antipathy toward the mechanism rose in him: it had killed a man and now he was to suffer the consequence of its blind, murderous ferocity Childishly, the thought arose that he would smash up the car as a punishment. Or smash it up with himself in it, dying in its twisted artifices to make a final and satisfactory recompense for their joint killing of a gifted and beloved scholar.

He got into the car and the slam of its door had restored him to the familiar behind-the-wheel world where he spent so much of his life. He drove to the highway and followed the green and white signs to the turnpike that led back to the city. That anyone would be looking for him so close to the scene of the event after so many getaway hours had elapsed did not seem likely. Nevertheless, as he slowed under the numeral *6* that marked the entrance, he was relieved to find the tollgates empty and silent under the lights, the automatic card machine mutely holding out a card for him to take.

It was forty miles later, north of Exit 10, that the tractor-trailer made its sudden and inexplicable stop, an act of heedless indifference that had sent him careening to the shoulder of the highway. As he now sat in his stalled car, long after the red-spangled rear wall of T. I. Siphone's truck had diminished in the darkness, he realized he had eaten nothing since lunch, 14 hours earlier.

At the next turnoff he stopped at one of the restaurants that had been granted the right in perpetuity to serve deep-fat-fried plastics to captive

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motorists, and forced himself to eat a dried synthetic sandwich and to drink cautiously weak, scalding coffee that burned his mouth.

Back on the road he had driven nearly ten miles when he passed the T. I. Siphone rig parked on the shoulder, marked off with yellow flares whose flames soared and wavered in the slipstream of his passing. The truck lights were on but its high dark cab gave no evidence of a driver, no glow of a cigarette. Nor was there any peering figure squatting before the gigantic tires.

He thought vaguely of the stories he had read as a boy of phantom ships doomed to roam the seas forever. It was easy to conjure up some Flying Dutchman of the turnpikes, crewless, homing in on the tollbooths, cruising forever on the endless highways of the continent. Whatever it was, it had come within inches of killing him.

But had it been the truck? Might it still not be the result of his drinking, the price of the false expense-account bonhomie among men he hoped never to see again?

Unbidden, the voice of the news announcer rose in his consciousness: "... coveted award of Best Teacher ... extensive writing in the field of classical studies ... religion of the early Greek city states ..."

His dark rear-view mirror lit up as headlights moved into its vision. The lights held steady, swiftly closing in on him. He pushed the accelerator down and moved ahead but the lights relentlessly remained in their same relative position. His speedometer rose from 70 to 75 to 80 and his steering wheel began to tremble ominously but the lights stayed effortlessly on his tail.

He slowed to 55 and the lights swung out of his mirror with startling abruptness, appeared in his outside mirror, and moved steadily past him in the inside lane. On the looming silver side of the trailer he saw the letters E, N, O, H, P pull steadily ahead. As the letter T passed him he applied his brakes gently so as to permit the truck to make its dangerous passing more quickly.

At the same instant the front end of the tractor swerved in front of him, the trailer whipping viciously into his lane, the tall box tilting wildly. He jerked his car to the shoulder of the turnpike and the swinging trailer cleared his front end by inches. Had he not braked when he did, the trailer would have swept him into the steel-cabled fence at the edge of the road.

He stopped the car on the shoulder and watched as the

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double rear doors of the trailer sailed away into the night with a brutal stateliness. The truck had tried to kill him. The first occurrence, the sudden stop directly in his path, might conceivably have been accidental; but this murderous side-swiping swing of the trailer convinced him that he was marked for death in some grim, mindless game of turnpike roulette. His safest course, he reasoned, was to leave the turnpike at the next exit rather than to continue to his original destination of Exit 12 where the turnpike descended into the tunnel.

He forced himself to wait for 30 endless minutes so as to give the truck enough time to be safely ahead, and then he got back on the road. As he pulled into the side lane approaching Exit 11, he saw several cars stopped in the lane and the whirling dome light of a highway patrol car and the intermittent flashes of an emergency vehicle. A police flashlight waved him away from the exit lane and back to the main road. Jackknifed across the approach lane to the exit was T. I. Siphone's truck, its silver wall solidly blocking the exit, its angled cab menacing and silent.

He now realized that he would be able to leave the turnpike via the tunnel exit without further threat from the truck. The exit was 15 miles away and he saw little possibility of the truck being maneuvered back on the road in time to overtake him. Also, the sight of the truck sprawled across the exit lane enabled him to regard the vehicle within a renewed framework of reality.

Here was no sadistic driver who had selected a victim at random and harried him over the length of the turnpike. It seemed more likely to him that the truck was driven by some birdbrain who was deadened to other traffic by the long lonely haul and the domineering power of his vehicle.

He settled down to the hypnosis of the turnpike and as thoughts of the truck receded he saw once again the spinning book, the outflung arms, and felt the physical weight of his guilt descend on him.

The interior of the car lit up with the reflection in his mirror of rapidly approaching headlights. He rolled his window down and heard the bellow of a racing truck engine and the snoring rasp of its tires. As its lights filled his mirror his sense of the unreal returned and he knew what the name on the truck would be, and he knew, too, that he was trapped between it and the tunnel.

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But the truck did not move out to pass him; it kept a sensible distance. Ahead he saw the lights of the tollbooths at the tunnel's entrance and with a flash of fear realized what the truck would do. As he stopped to pay the toll the truck would crash into him from the rear. Defective brakes—that's what the plea would be.

But the headlights moved out of his mirror and the truck drew alongside, easily keeping abreast. He braced himself for another maniacal swing of the trailer, but the truck shifted away to make a sedate approach to the tollbooth at his left. Circumspectly, both vehicles halted, did what was required, and moved abreast down the two-lane slope toward the mouth of the tunnel.

At the thought of traversing the confines of the tunnel in the company of the truck he panicked and pressed his foot down. His car shot ahead, aimed directly at the tunnel's mouth which in his excited state now appeared to be only one-lane wide. He knew he must pass into it before the truck overtook him and crushed him somewhere inside the roaring hideous tube.

On his left the truck bulled its way down the incline, the roaring of its engine amplified by the rising walls of the depressed roadway. Abreast they sped toward the tunnel's mouth, the dark cab towering over him. The truck swerved slightly toward his lane and he overreacted by hugging the curbing that ran along the foot of the wall of the cut. His tires screamed against the concrete; his car mounted the curb and its right side scraped against the wall. Above the screech of metal he heard the voice of the news announcer:

" . . . tomorrow's *Times* will say concerning Dr. McAllister: 'His trilogy on the concept of revenge in early Greek religion is regarded as his greatest work. The three volumes dealt with the Greek avenging Furies: Allecto the Unceasing, Megaera the Grudging, and Tisiphone the Avenger.' "

His car bounced off the wall, struck the huge rear wheel of the trailer, and ricocheted back to the wall. The gas tank exploded and by the orange light of the flames he saw the mouth of the tunnel waiting for him.

It was the last thing he saw.

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"Mordre wol out, certein, it wol nat faille."
— GEOFFREY CHAUCER: The Canterbury Tales

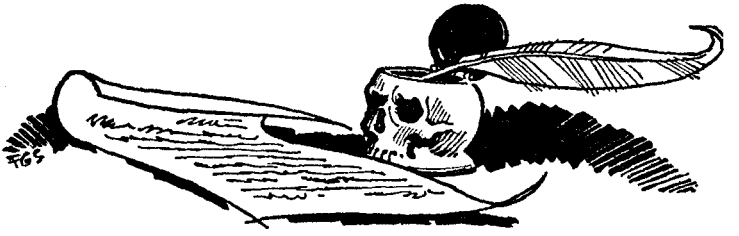
MURDER WILL OUT

by EDWARD WELLEN

VICTIM: Here he comes, oozing crocodile tears. Could I but throw off this illness and grow pert once more, they would be real tears. Still, he will weep sincerely when he finds the vaults bare. I have spent all to buy future life. But now my heart is faint, my belly writhes, my hands clutch at the sheet as if it were the thread of life, and all my members fall to trembling. My throat is choke-full of dust. This is the taste of death.

MURDERER: *Now he dies. The sun will not sink below the horizon, I think, before he is gone and all falls to me. But I must show grief even as I rejoice in my heart. Wealth and mastery are now mine, and I will ram through great works and far outbuild him. Set your mind at rest, I keep telling myself: for the tomb will mask it. What I have done will remain forever hidden.*

DETECTIVE: Ha! Then I'm right. The state of the mucous lining and a rough chemical analysis of the skin confirm my hunch. Later I'll hike over to the lab for more conclusive tests. But I can tell you now how you met your end. Someone fed you arsenic. Unfortunately, it's a bit late for an official autopsy report in your case, you poor old bundle of rags, you poor old mummy.



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a *NEW* "miracle problem" of

THE GREAT MERLINI

by CLAYTON RAWSON

The great magician-detective is called in to investigate a poison case, which Merlini believes to be "the best kind—they usually have the most subtlety"...

"The World's Smallest Locked Room" is the last story about The Great Merlini—the last story Clayton Rawson wrote before his death on March 1, 1971. Mr. Rawson had planned a new series of "Merlinis," to be published in EQMM and to be added to the earlier Merlini tales to make up the first book of Merlini short stories, a book destined without question to be a Queen's Quorum selection. Now, alas, Clayt is gone... and how very deeply he will be missed...

THE WORLD'S SMALLEST LOCKED ROOM

by CLAYTON RAWSON

I am sorry to have been so remiss in keeping you up to date on The Great Merlini. At the time of his last recorded case he lived in an old red-brick house at 13½ Washington Square North. He was evicted several years ago by a mushrooming New York University which bought all the houses on that side of the square for administrative offices, a ploy they may have come to regret. A magician on that property was never as much of a headache as some of the students they now administer.

Merlini and Mrs. Merlini moved to Westchester into a gracefully nostalgic 100-year-old house on North Barry Avenue, Mamaroneck. He

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avoids trains and drives into Manhattan perhaps once a week. The Magic Shop of which he is the proprietor has expanded until it is now the largest emporium of magicians' supplies in the world. His latest catalog (in two colors) weighs two pounds, three ounces, and sells for $2.50. His Mail Order Department accounts for much of this expansion; I have seen orders written in Swahili sent in by witch doctors in the Congo.

Burt Fawkes, his right-hand man, now heads a staff of four plus a young lady bookkeeper who was once a Playboy bunny and sometimes moonlights by being sawed in two and floated in midair for purchasers of those miracles.

You won't find The Great Merlini's name in the phone book because his number is unlisted as a protection against customers who want instant delivery of such items as fully grown elephants that vanish into thin air and install-it-yourself trap doors. The only people who know his number are a few friends such as myself and Chief Inspector Gavigan, and, of course, the New York Homicide Squad, the Medical Examiner's office, and the Mamaroneck cops.

There was a rumor at one time that Merlini, like Sherlock Holmes, had spent a few years in Tibet as a guest of the Dalai Lama studying astral levitation, but this was merely a pipe-dream that a magazine writer sold to a men's magazine whose editor had forgotten that the Dalai Lama hasn't lived in Tibet since the Communists moved in.

Another rumor had Merlini studying Indian magic on the banks of the Ganges. He did make one trip there but found that a great many Indian magicians had purchased their miracles by mail from his own shop. And like many other Occidental magicians before him, he never did get a look at the famous Indian Rope Trick. No one seemed to be doing it at the time.

Merlini has made Mamaroneck world-renowned among magicians because of his outdoor stage, a replica of the one at Maskelyne and Devant's Egyptian Hall, on which he recreates and often improves on such historical illusions as De Kolta's Vanishing Lady and Thurston's Princess Karnak who floats in midair. Last year he exhibited a Headless Lady (really topless), then brought in a small box which he put on a table at the opposite side of the stage. The sides of the box hinged downward to disclose the lady's head, alive and talking (Colonel Stodare's

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Sphinx illusion). This was a natural combination of two famous tricks which nobody had ever before thought of doing at the same time.

Another reason you haven't heard much of Merlini lately is that your correspondent, Ross Harte, has been traveling as a theatrical publicity man with various road companies. Merlini and I, however, have a collection of tape recordings of several murder cases he managed to become involved in during what little spare time he has had.

For several years Inspector Gavigan objected to the appearance of the tapes in print because he claimed that he and the Homicide Squad too often received second billing (the show business bug had apparently bitten him too!). He also said that this hurt the squad's public image, something that annoyed both the Police Commissioner and His Honor, the Mayor. But Gavigan doesn't have to worry about the politicians now. Recently he retired from the force to a rustic retreat in Connecticut where there is much less carbon monoxide and where he is writing a history of the New York Police Department.

One of the most interesting of Merlini's unpublished cases is the poisoning that occurred in Pancakes Unlimited, a restaurant half a mile from Merlini's home. Actually I got into the case before either Merlini or Gavigan did. I was having dinner with a former Pinkerton man who, bored with watching for pickpockets at Aqueduct, had set up his own private-eye agency, an outfit he called Sam Spade, Inc., probably because his name was Hammett Wilde. He is no relation to either Dashiell or Oscar, but he is the only literate Pinkerton man I know. He once read Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* at one sitting.

Pancakes Unlimited serves every kind of pancake and waffle known to man plus a few they have invented. I was having their Strawberry Special —a heaping portion of fresh strawberries surrounded by a thick ring of whipped cream on a succulent waffle. They also serve such mundane dishes as sausages and eggs, which Ham was having, and a huge selection of fancy desserts.

"Ham," I said, "you're Broadway. What are you doing out here twenty miles from Times Square?"

"Larchmont Race Week," he mumbled through his scrambled eggs. "That Falstaff type across the aisle owns a boat which I hope I don't have to follow. I get seasick."

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"Jealous wife?"

He nodded. "You'd better believe it. She suspects the blonde sitting next to him."

Falstaff, a beefy guy with a red face, suddenly exploded, "Dammit, Anna! It was just another underground film made on a shoestring budget. The odds were a million to one against it turning out to be such a smash hit!"

The girl said, "You were excited enough about it while we were filming. Now you act surprised. I didn't think you had to wait for the *Daily News* to tell you I'm the hottest discovery since Raquel Welch."

Opposite them a young man with horn-rimmed glasses and a bright red beard grumbled, "We all worked for peanuts the first time. But not again. You're going to have to rewrite the contract on the new one. I want a percentage of the gross." He took a packet of sugar from the dispenser on the table, tore it open, and angrily stirred the contents into his coffee.

The girl scowled. "He's right, Carl. Why should you be the only one to cash in?"

"I put up all the money, that's why." Falstaff turned to the young man. "Listen, Junior. I don't rewrite contracts." He lifted a hundred pages of script bound in blue from the seat beside him and tossed it across the table. "What needs rewriting is the script, not the contract." He took a silver hip flask from his pocket and after offering it to the girl and Junior, who declined, poured a generous portion into his own coffee.

Junior said stubbornly, "The contract has to be revamped first. I told you that last week. I'll think about the script after I've talked to my agent."

Falstaff snorted, took three packets of sugar from the dispenser and tore them open, littering the table with paper. "If he asks me to rewrite your contract, I'll rub your face in it. I need an okay script by the end of the week so that I can start casting."

"You know, darling," the girl said, "I'm going to see my agent too. I don't like the way you're acting."

"See your agent about what? The only dame in his new script is a sultry brunette, which you're not."

"What! Larry wouldn't leave me out. Not after all those rave reviews!" She scowled at Junior. "Carl's putting me on, isn't he, Larry?"

Junior mumbled in his beard, apparently at a loss for words.

So I got a couple in. "Ham," I said, "who are these characters?"

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"The Falstaff type," Ham said, "is Carl Hassleblad, producer. The Beard is Larry Allen, Junior, and the Girl is Anastasia Lovachevski."

"They haven't built a marquee big enough for that name."

"I know. And so do they. She's billed as Anna Love."

"She's a sex symbol all right, but isn't Love overdoing it a bit?"

"Maybe, but it also saves her having to change the initials on a lot of expensive luggage Carl bought her."

Across the aisle Larry was asking, "Did that waitress bring a check? I've got to leave."

Carl said, "Don't worry about it. And maybe you better make the girl a blonde in the revise. It'll give me less of a problem."

"I'll think about it," Larry said as he got to his feet and left the table.

Anna, in a worried tone, said, "You might have told me that the script had no part for me. What does Larry think he's trying to pull?"

Carl's brusqueness seemed suddenly to have deserted him. He spoke to her quietly, almost sleepily, "Take it easy, darling. It'll all be . . ." Abruptly he grabbed a napkin, put it over his mouth, and said, "Men's Room . . . I'm sorry . . ." He stumbled to his feet, upsetting a glass of water as he edged past the girl, and ran from the room.

Ham said, "Something disagreed with him, and I don't mean Larry." Then Ham followed him, saying, "You keep an eye on that dame."

Ham wasn't gone long, but when he came back he went right past me and into the phone booth near the cashier's desk. I didn't like the look of this and I followed him. Through the partly open door I heard him saying, " . . . and I want an ambulance fast! And a squad car. Get moving!"

Maybe it was a slow night for the Mamaroneck cops and they were glad to get some action or maybe the radio call reached them while they were cruising just a couple of blocks away; whatever the reason, their revolving red light pulled into the parking lot outside in almost nothing flat. The ambulance arrived about two minutes later and then Carl Hassleblad made his exit on a stretcher headed for the hospital in Port Chester.

As we watched the ambulance leave, Ham asked, "Is your friend Merlini anywhere within reach?"

"He's at home as far as I know. I saw him earlier today and he was expecting a dinner guest. Why him?"

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"I have a hunch that a magician may come in handy."

"And I have a hunch that his dinner guest will be interested too."

"Anybody I know?" Ham asked.

"What did you do before Pinkerton?"

"Twenty years a New York cop."

"Then you know him. It's former Chief Inspector Gavigan. Excuse me while I make a phone call." As I dialed I asked Ham over my shoulder, "Carl didn't look so good on that stretcher. What happened in there?"

"He was sick as a dog. Lost everything he ate. And he doubled up clutching his stomach and then passed out. Only thing he managed to say was 'I've been poisoned!' Oh, hell! That waitress has cleared off their table!" Ham ran off in that direction.

Merlini's voice from the phone receiver said, "I heard somebody say, 'I've been poisoned!' Anybody I know?"

"Could be," I said. "Guy named Hassleblad."

"Oh, it's you, Ross. Which Hassleblad?"

"There are *two* guys with a name like that?" I asked.

"Victor for one," Merlini said. "He designed one of the world's best cameras. And I know where you can pick up a couple of them for nothing."

"I'll bite. Where?"

"Though they might be a little difficult to get to. The Apollo Eleven astronauts left one on the moon and another in orbit. Victor's still manufacturing the cameras in Sweden. So it's probably Carl, the producer of *Amour! Amour!*"

"Right you are. You've seen the film?"

"No, but his cameraman came to me for some technical advice on special effects while it was being filmed. Who poisoned him?"

"That's the question the cops are going to be asking. I thought maybe with a murder in your own backyard you'd want a front-row seat. You've always said that poisoning cases are the best kind."

"They usually have the most subtlety. Where are you?"

I told him and he hung up without saying goodbye.

I went back to our table.

Ham said, "That waitress is too damned efficient. She'd taken the dirty plates to the kitchen and was wiping the table top off by the time I got there. I raided the kitchen and brought the stuff back. The toxicology boys will want a look at any food that was left."

"Merlini is on the way," I

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told Ham. "I hope they don't get picked up for speeding; it might embarrass the Inspector."

At the table opposite, Anna faced one of the cops, a sergeant, across a pile of dirty dishes. "There was another man eating with you?" he said. "Who?"

Anna dabbed at her eyes with a hanky. "Larry Allen, a writer. He—he left just a few minutes ago."

"Any idea where he might have gone?"

"New York maybe. He's driving a white Chevy."

The first cop turned to his partner, "Get on the radio, Joe, and see if they can catch him. Might be on the Thruway going west."

Joe hadn't realized what a dangerous case he was on. As he got into the squad car, a fiery red Ferrari zoomed into the drive and just missed him. The Great Merlini likes fast, low-slung sports cars, although how he gets his long lean frame into one makes me suspect that he may have once done a turn as a contortionist.

He extricated himself somehow, came into the restaurant followed by Gavigan, spotted the cop near our table, and joined us.

"Mystery solved yet?" he asked, obviously hoping it hadn't been.

"Ham!" Gavigan exclaimed. "It's good to see you! I hear you're not casing the racetracks any more."

"Maybe I should have retired like you. Tailing erring husbands can get complicated."

Merlini glanced at Anna. "I see we have the star of Carl's film with us. Were they eating here?"

Ham said, "Yes, and the guy who wrote the flick. He lammed a few moments before Carl headed for the Boy's Room and got sick. I followed Carl, saw him collapse, then called for cops and an ambulance. We need to have a heart-to-heart talk with the chef and the waitress."

Gavigan asked, "Would they have motives?"

"I doubt it, but we'd better check it out. No one else came close to touching Hassleblad's food."

"You were watching them all the time they were eating?" Gavigan wanted to know.

Ham nodded. "I started tailing Carl late this afternoon. He and Anna left the Larchmont Yacht Club at five ten. I suspect she spent last night with him on his boat. I followed them here and came in just as they were ordering. The joint's not crowded yet and I got one of the tables for two just across from their booth. Carl ordered

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Blueberry Blintzes and Anna had Crêpes Suzettes. Larry arrived just as they were being served. He didn't seem hungry; he settled for a toasted English muffin. They all had coffee and Carl added a shot of brandy to his."

"He brought his own?" Merlini asked. "I don't see any bar."

"Hip flask," Ham said. "It's his favorite drink. I suppose his wife could have doped it, but I doubt it. She wants him back."

Gavigan asked, "Did Hassleblad leave the table at any time after the food was served?"

"No. They all stayed put, arguing mostly. Ross heard some of it."

I nodded. "Larry apparently wrote *Amour! Amour!* for a flat fee and since it turned out to be a smash, Carl is due to collect big. Larry wants a new contract with better terms the second time around, but since he'd already signed one he was in a bind. And Carl wouldn't listen to him."

"Anna," Ham added, "was making the same sort of complaint. I don't think either of them has a very smart agent."

"You're sure," Gavigan asked, "that neither one touched Carl's food?"

"They didn't even come close. I'm sure."

"I doubt if anybody used any salt with that menu," Merlini said. "How about cream and sugar in the coffees?"

"Carl has a sweet tooth. Three sugars in his coffee. Larry took one and Anna had hers black, without sugar."

Merlini said, "Excuse me," and vanished into the kitchen. The sergeant put the teen-aged waitress through a wringer. Nervously she swore she had never seen Carl Hassleblad before in her life. The chef, a tall black man, said the same. "First time I ever laid eyes on him was when they carried him out."

Gavigan said, "Ham, either you're wrong about the wife putting something in the brandy or you missed something."

Ham shook his head. "I don't think his wife wants to get rid of him, especially not this way. And I spent twenty years on the force, most of it on the Homicide Squad, so I'm pretty sure I didn't miss anything."

The sergeant said, "Joe, call the hospital and get a report. I'd like to know what the charge is going to be. If it's Murder One we got trouble."

Joe left just as another squad car rolled in, and in a few moments a cop entered with Junior.

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"We caught up with him near Mount Vernon," the cop reported.

Larry was filled in on what had happened after he left, and I wished someone would fill me in on what Merlini was doing.

Then the kitchen door opened and Merlini came back. He held a small piece of paper in his hand which he pocketed before I could see what it was.

"Find something?" I asked.

"Yes. A clue. A very small one—almost invisible—but it may have done the trick."

Joe came back from the phone just then. "It's not murder—not yet anyway. They pumped his stomach out and are holding the contents for analysis. He's still in the intensive care unit, and the doctor says the prognosis is fair but he'll know better in the morning."

"And," Gavigan added, "it'll be two or three days before we know what he swallowed, maybe longer. I'll bet the county lab has to send it to the Manhattan M.E.'s office before we get anything like a full toxicological report." He turned to Merlini. "You found something. What was it?"

Merlini went to an empty table three booths away from the one where Carl, Anna, and Larry had sat. Then he beckoned to a waitress and said, "Coffee for two, please."

As she left to get it Merlini nodded at the Inspector.

"We were just about to have our coffee when Ross called. I could use some now. Join me?"

Gavigan nodded and sat down opposite him. The waitress returned with cups, saucers, spoons, and a Silex of coffee just as Merlini lit one of the cigarillos he smokes these days because the Surgeon General hasn't insisted that cigars bear the "hazardous to the health" warning.

He flicked the cigar and a burst of bright flame fell down and winked out, leaving no residue.

The waitress jumped. "What was that?"

"Brimstone," Merlini grinned. "The devil supplies it when I've been a bad boy. I must have done something wrong today. Sign a compact with His Nibs and that's what happens." More flame—a bigger burst this time—lit up his face. The waitress backed away.

Merlini was feeling pleased about something.

He poured coffee for Gavigan and himself. "I want you all to remember that this is the first time I've come near this table." There was a chromed wire dispenser that held about a dozen sugar packets in the middle of the table. The

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packets were stacked one above another, and Gavigan took two. "You've figured out how Carl was poisoned?"

"Yes. There's only one way it could have been done."

The Inspector tore the end off his first sugar packet, started to pour the contents into his coffee, then stopped and dumped the rest into his palm. It wasn't sugar at all, but a dark-brown flaky substance. Gavigan wet a finger, picked a bit of it up, and put it on his tongue.

"Tobacco!" he growled. "How did you manage that?"

Merlini smiled. "Sleight of hand. A very simple variety. No practise needed. Any twelve-year-old could do it even if he's never owned a toy set of magic tricks."

"But," Gavigan objected, "you didn't touch my sugar packet."

"Offstage I did," Merlini said. "In the kitchen. There's a boxful of sugar packets there. I slit one open with a kitchen paring knife, took out the sugar, and put in the tobacco. Just a tiny slit because I didn't have anything like rubber cement to reseal it. I figured you'd tear it open without taking a close look. Who does?"

Ham asked, "But how did it get on the table? You bribed a waitress to put it there?"

Merlini shook his head. "No. I put it there. That's where the sleight of hand came in. I had two sugar packets concealed in my hand when I reached for one for myself. I put them both in the dispenser, then removed the first for myself and left the other—the one that contained the tobacco. If I had used something that looked like sugar you would have dropped it all into your coffee. What did *you* use, Larry?"

Larry grunted. "Me?"

"You put sugar in your coffee. So did Carl. Anna used none. You're the only one who could have planted poisoned sugar."

"I used tartar emetic because it looks like sugar and you don't need a prescription to buy it."

"That has antimony in it," Gavigan said, "and a bitter metallic taste. You knew Carl used lots of sugar?"

"Yes. He always put three teaspoonfuls in his coffee. And the brandy helped too. Antimony is as poisonous as arsenic if you get enough of it, but I only added a small pinch to the sugar. I didn't want to kill him—only to scare some of the self-satisfied, greedy conceit out of him. That film may make him a million dollars and he won't divvy up any of it with anybody else. Next time I

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might use something more lethal."

"I doubt it," Merlini said. "I don't think you're the type. You did one thing many poisoners don't bother to do: you hung around long enough to see that the right person got the doctored sugar. And the method you used was intelligent too. It's simple, almost undetectable, and the victim himself destroys the evidence that the packet had been tampered with by tearing it open.

"I was just lucky getting to it before it reached the incinerator. The waitress had thrown the sugar papers into a garbage can and I managed to get there before the can had been emptied. I found the paper"—Merlini took it from his pocket—"which will be Exhibit A if Carl doesn't recover. Look closely and you can see the slit that was very carefully closed with rubber cement."

"He'll recover," Larry said. "I didn't use much."

"The sugar packet idea," Merlini added, "is also neat because they are filled and sealed by machine and only a very suspicious person would suspect that one of them contained something other than sugar."

"Sealed by machine," I said. "In a way, it's like a locked-room problem. Only this time instead of a murderer having to get out of a sealed 'room,' he had to put something into it."

"And if you ever write it up," Gavigan added, "you can called it *The World's Smallest Locked Room.*"

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Visualize the background: the unusual Nevada setting of Pyramid Lake, its waters shifting from blue to green, and the weirdly shaped tufa stone. Visualize that tall self-assured widow with her Afghan hounds, especially Daphne and Nero, and her sleek quarter horses. And visualize her gambler husband, dead only three months . . .

THE LADY OF THE AFGHANS

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Pyramid Lake can't be seen from the ranch house. It lies behind a slope, on the other side of a strange hill that rises like a cone to cut off the lake view from the house and from the long curving driveway. But if you walk into the south pasture, the water can be seen, its color shifting from blue to green. Beside it, pinnacles and tortuous formations of tufa stone rise from the earth, like agonized creations of hell doomed for an arid eternity to gaze at that beautiful wetness.

And if you should walk along the Lake's shore, and were unfamiliar with the area, you would never dream that a hideaway ranch was tucked behind that funny-looking hill.

Well, it used to be a hideaway ranch. Before Poulton Demarest discovered he had such a bad heart. When he found out he untied most of his Nevada gambling operations and lived the quiet life. And married. Me.

Torrey Lanier and I were sitting on the veranda and Torrey was stroking my arm in a good-fellow sort of way, testing how this went over. Then his fingers started going tickly-tickly, twiddly-twiddly up my arm. In a minute he was going to lean closer and start whispering in my ear. The man was getting all carried away with love for me. And my three million dollars, with this ranch thrown in extra. And he was

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the lawyer who was going to get it all settled fast for the poor young widow whose late husband's relatives were suing to take it away from her. Suing for the money, that is. The ranch was already in my name. An engagement present.

To prepare the way for his tickling, Torrey had just said the only trouble about the money would be the delay. The cousins were only seconds and thirds. But they were a dangerous nuisance, because what they lacked in thickness of blood they made up for in their determination to get Poulton's money.

Poulton. A funny first name. Actually, it was a family name and these cousins had it for their last names. I tried to remember how Poulton looked. He had been dead only three months, which isn't long; but even before that I had gotten into the habit of wiping Poulton out of my mind. I closed my eyes against the strong Nevada sun and tried to visualize his face. But I opened them again. It was too much like the nights when it was dark and all I could see were visions.

Anyway, who could think with that irritating twiddly-twiddly going up my arm. I considered reaching over and taking Torrey's fat cheek between my fingers. Not just a coy playful pinch. Twisting. Hard. But then, he was my lawyer. And the more he felt a personal interest, the faster he might get my money matters settled.

Daphne, one of Poulton's beautiful Afghan hounds, came up and nuzzled Torrey's hand off my arm and laid her long skeleton's head on my shoulder. Despite their silky topknots the Afghans always looked like death's-heads to me. Yet they were sweet creatures, loving, gentle things when they were separate. Two together, or in a pack, were something different. At the least they were unpredictable, at the most they could become lethal hunters.

Poulton and I once saw Daphne and Nero, her mate, catch a neighbor's dog. It was a good-sized stocky bulldog. Nero caught one ear, Daphne the other. They ran that dog over the fields and not even Poulton's whistles and shouts could bring them back. We found the bulldog later with its throat ripped out.

For a long time after that I shrank from the Afghans. But then I began to accept their Afghan nature. Hunter-pack nature. And after thinking about the daily newspaper headlines, I faced up to it—if Afghans revolted me, so should people.

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Poulton had a kennel full of Afghans. Fifteen. Now I had them.

"Angel Face," Torrey was murmuring. "How trite that sounds, but with you it's true. Angel Face. If angels really look like you I'm going to reform. Later, of course. Tomorrow maybe."

I smiled, doing my best to act like an angel. Fallen, that is. That would be the kind Torrey wanted. I didn't fool around telling him, oh, no, I don't look like an angel, do you really think I'm beautiful. I've got mirrors, and eyes.

"When I was a kid I made taffy. Pulled it," and he gave my long hair a tug. "Your hair looks like taffy."

"Shall we go for a ride?" I asked. "Poulton has—I mean, I have—some great quarter horses. Let's ride down to the Lake."

I stood up, all five feet eleven of me. Daphne reared up, put her paws on my shoulders, and laid her head against me. Two long lean gals. "Diana the Huntress," Torrey said. "You should be named Diana."

"Sorry," I said. "The name's Maggie. Or if you would care to be formal, Margaret. Daphne, love, you want to run along while we ride?"

She got down and ran in circles, like a puppy. Out of the house she ran ahead toward the stables, graceful, leaping without sound, like a dog in a dream.

I could tell that Torrey would have preferred to go from the veranda into the cool living room, or perhaps even deeper into the house, testing again what his tickle might accomplish. But I was the boss. I was the one who owned the big ranch with its main house, guest houses—I kept him stashed away in one—swimming pool, stables, kennels, horses, cattle. And all that money.

When we reached the main road where we could see the Lake, I checked Steppy, my mount, and breathed in the sight. Literally, it seemed. A deep breath of mystery and beauty. The water was smooth this day because there was no wind. Its pyramid and Anaho Island, ugly-beautiful mounds rearing out of the water like prehistoric monuments. The harsh sun-scorched earth around it, its tufa hillocks infested with rattlesnakes and bull snakes. And quiet, so quiet. In the distance the Indian settlement blended into the landscape. The whole scene had an everlasting, yet fierce and immediate, quality.

Torrey was the pretty one of the pair of us. I had on faded blue jeans and a loose shirt.

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Torrey had on tailored jodhpurs and polished Eastern riding boots. Every day he'd been at the ranch he had worn either them or shorts and a wild sports shirt—a New Yorker's idea of what Westerners wear. He was the only sour note in the scene. He didn't belong out here. He belonged in a New York riding school where he had probably taken a swift course of riding lessons before coming out to Nevada to represent his law firm. Most of Poulton's money was handled through New York.

But even though he didn't fit the scene, if he hadn't reminded me so much of Poulton, Torrey would have looked quite handsome. Dark liquid eyes, smooth olive complexion, good features. The only thing that didn't remind me of Poulton was his tweaky little mustache —tweaky because I had to fight against giving it a yank to see if it would come off.

I had decided it would be too mean to give him one of the feisty little quarter horses, so I picked out a sweet old black character who was surefooted. For me Steppy, a neck-curving darling who went over the ground like Fred Astaire doing a fast turn. Although I expect I didn't make the most attractive picture on a small horse, with my long legs—

"How gorgeous you look," Torrey said, always sensitive to the uptake. "Like a centauress. I swear, you don't budge when that horse jumps around."

So I was wrong, I looked great. But if you know how to ride, to an amateur you'd look great on an iguana.

Steppy and I went on ahead, stirring a breeze into the still day. Daphne ran along, now beside us, now ahead. Her death's-head look vanished out in the open when she was running free, a poem of motion. I thought how exquisite it would be to see all fifteen of the Afghans leaping, stretching over the earth, silent unearthly creatures, as though the ancient deserts of the East had come alive.

Down by the shore I pulled Steppy to a halt, got off, and shaded my eyes to watch a boat manned by Indians skim across the water. Torrey and his old black lady ambled up, and he got off and stood beside me. Sure enough, there was his blasted paw on my arm again. I wondered why such a big law firm as Poulton had had didn't character-screen the men they sent out. Or maybe they had. Lonely widow, heiress, good-looking single man on the make—how better to assure a loyal client so long as their man kept coming back to the home

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stable. But what if he found better hay in the pasture and rambled off with the heiress? Oh, well, that was their problem. My problem was with his hands.

I took one and pulled—like let's have fun, let's run and play. With his weight he could be worn out with just a little running on a hot day. He brightened, his big wet eyes shining. He ran with me back from the shore, Daphne leaping beside us. Before I knew what he had in mind he had wheeled me between two enormous rocks that formed a minature gorge, whipped his arms about me and was kissing me, his lips as wet as his eyes.

Darling Daphne! She leaped on his back, friendly, only playing. But when she saw me struggling, pulling one way while she pushed the other, the team spirit got to her. To Daphne I became another Afghan and we were buddies, worrying our prey. She smiled that shocking death's-head grin and grabbed Torrey's ear. He shouted and let go of me. When I stepped back, Daphne let go, looking puzzled and disappointed, as if I were the dumbest Afghan she had ever run across. Torrey's ear was bleeding.

"I have fifteen of these, Mr. Lanier," I said. "Perhaps we'd better stick to just business."

Torrey scowled, set his teeth as though he wanted to bite both of us. But Daphne had bigger teeth and I was potentially too rich.

"Snakes are in these rocks too. Rattlers. Big ones. It's not healthy to plunge about in rock crevasses."

He took out his handkerchief and dabbed his ear. It was only a scratch where a tooth had slid across. His smile had a mean slant to it.

"Didn't Mr. Demarest die from a rattlesnake bite? Was he plunging about in these rocks? With Diana and her hounds?"

"The name's Maggie," I said. "And Mr. Demarest happened to be my husband. We were past the need for plunging. And the hounds were his. Let's get up to the house and find some iodine."

That night at dinner Torrey asked, "How long was it that you were married before Mr. Demarest so unfortunately passed away?"

"Eight months," I said. "Haven't you got it in your papers?"

"Oh, yes, of course," he said. "It was just that I noticed you've been owner of the ranch for over a year. I thought perhaps there was a typographical error. As if you were *actually* married a year and

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eight months. These errors do happen."

"They do, don't they?" I said. "Would you like to hear the story of my life?"

"I'd be fascinated. Absolutely fascinated. You intrigue me. Terrifically."

"I intrigue myself. But, sorry. I scarcely know the story myself. And that's the way I like it."

"Now you do make me curious. I suppose I shall just have to find out by myself. But then, that's the kind of problem lawyers are always running into."

Nasty shyster. The thought crossed my mind to call the New York office and get him taken off the case. But then, I didn't care to have all that attention. And maybe have Torrey switch to the relatives. Better to wait it out.

"When we go completely through the papers and ledgers I have here one more time, I doubt you'll need to inconvenience yourself by staying any longer," I told Torrey. "So right after dinner let's get at them."

"I don't know—a lot of those papers have to be fitted into the total picture. And you won't let me take them back to New York—"

"Photostat them. We can do it tomorrow."

"I might miss something," he said sleekly. "Better if I make several careful reviews. Oh, two or three. I'll need at least another week."

He had a glaze that looked as though it could be shattered like glass over the animosity in his eyes. He had been stupid, and was aware of it. No matter how much a man might want to wring a woman's neck, he had better wait until they are married and he has a signed document letting him in on the money she has. I kicked off my slipper and rubbed my foot on Daphne's warm furry body. She liked to lie at my feet when I ate. And I liked having fifty pounds of grinning dog around when I ate dinner with a man who had a toothy grin and mean eyes.

We worked over the papers until almost midnight. Torrey was smart, I'll say that for him. His mind worked like a steel trap, and when he put his attention on nothing but business, Poulton's scattered papers began to fall into a perfect file system. Torrey was not only a lawyer, he was a super-accountant as well. I warmed up to him a bit—that is, the way I'd warm up to any good accountant who added up my figures and reached a total I liked.

Sarah, the cook, had gone to

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bed. So I went into the kitchen and made us some coffee and sandwiches. Daphne followed me. She cocked her head on one side to listen to the sporadic barks from the kennels. Then suddenly she pushed open the back screen and leaped out. I went out to the breezeway to call her back before she started running. But it was too late. The big moon was casting long shadows all over the place and Daphne was chasing them. I yelled, but it was like yelling at a ghost in a dream. She vanished into the pasture.

I hoped to heaven that no calf got excited and began to run away from her. Our cows were dehorned and besides not even a mad mother cow could stop a playful Afghan from running a calf to death. We never let the Afghans loose at night, when it would be hard to ride them down.

I had on a blue and silver caftan and silly silver slippers. But I ran to the stable, put a bridle on Steppy, and jumped on bareback. No time for a saddle. We pounded across the pasture with me screaming, "Daphne! Here, girl!"

It took quite a time to locate her. Sure enough, the devil was in the far pasture with the cows and calves. But when I got right at her she skinned her lips back from her gums in that horrible loving grin and followed Steppy and me like a lonesome puppy. After I had Steppy back in his stall I grabbed Daphne's silky ear and led her to the ranch house, Daphne walking with high proud steps, her tail curved into a loose shepherd's crook.

Torrey stood at the kitchen door. He shook his head from side to side. "I don't believe it," he said. "What I saw. An oriental Valkyrie riding through the night after a specter dog. Then coming back in the moonlight like a vision." He moved close as I went through the door and breathed, "Lucky Poulton Demarest."

I started to say, "Poulton is dead, do you call that lucky?" But a wise character like Torrey could take that wrong. Anyway, luck—bad luck, that is—had nothing to do with Poulton being dead. It was his own foolishness. He knew there were snakes in those rocks down by the Lake. He shouldn't have walked so far from the ranch. Or into the rocks.

Of course, the dogs were rampaging down there. And no telling what or who they might tear up when they got going. But with Poulton's bad heart it was his own foolishness. He had gambled he would make it, and he had lost.

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So the Indians had found him after he'd been dead several hours. They heard Daphne and Nero keening from a crevasse in the tufa rocks. All the Afghans adored Poulton, especially Daphne. I think that was why she loved me so much now. I was a keepsake left over from Poulton. The Afghans should have been at Poulton's funeral instead of the gamblers and businessmen, and the cousins of course, who also came. Imagine —all fifteen of the Afghans, the ones who really loved him, sitting in that funeral parlor, their regal topknots held high. And later, their big shaggy feet stepping softly behind the casket. And at the grave, keening a last farewell.

I said to Torrey, "We finished so much work tonight, really you should be able to leave in a day or two."

He drew back to let me in. I could feel his eyes slithering over me. "Eat your sandwich," he said. "You must be starved after all that hullabaloo. And I'm still hungry. Maggie, do you mind putting that dog in your room? After her chewing on my ear today, she gives me the creeps."

So I did. Sarah had turned back my covers. Daphne plunged under them. Which meant I had to round up another pillowcase before I went to bed. I shut the door and returned to the kitchen.

It happened so fast I was off guard. Torrey was heavily built, so I never dreamed he could move so fast. He was as quick and sinuous as a Yemenite dancer. Before I could move he flipped off the kitchen light, grabbed me, smeared kisses all over my neck and face. I'm tall and strong. But this man was like a wrestler and he outweighed me by a good fifty pounds.

We staggered around the kitchen floor, my fingernails tearing at his fat cheeks, my long hair stifling both of us. Daphne was making soft whuffs from the bedroom, alerted and anxious. My caftan ripped at the shoulder. "Pig! Filthy pig! I'll get you fired!" He laughed. More wrestling, more struggling.

Then I lay quiet. "That's better, that's better," he whispered. He put his face down to kiss me. I moved my face as though to kiss his cheek. I did. A kiss with teeth. He screamed, fell aside. I jumped up and ran through the lighted dining room into my bedroom.

I expected Torrey to be packed and dressed for traveling the next morning. But no. He had on shorts and sports shirt and was hanging over Sarah in the kitchen as if he owned the place, telling her just how he

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wanted his eggs. He turned to look at me, his insolent smile almost wiping out the blue dots that my teeth had left on his cheek.

"Hi, Maggie, Beautiful. There, Sarah, they're ready, I like them scrambled soft. Oh, say, Maggie, I didn't have time to tell you last night. But while you were chasing Daphne and stayed out so long, I took another look at your husband's private box and the papers. Just to see if there was anything we had overlooked.

"Well, I noticed that the lining on the lid of the box was curling at one end and the whole lining looked loose. So I thought I'd spend the time fixing it and lifted it a trifle more to see what kind of glue was used. Well, Maggie, there was a folded sheet of thin paper inside the lid. Under the lining. Something Mr. Demarest tucked inside. Just in case, I suppose."

"In case of what?"

"Let's go into the dining room," he said. "Oh, you will be eating, won't you, Maggie, something more than coffee? No? Personally, my appetite's fine this morning. Although it's a little difficult to chew. Something bit my cheek last night. You do have Black Widows around here, don't you?"

We went into the dining room and he shut the door to the kitchen. We sat down. "Listen, you creep," I said. "You've got some kind of meanness on your mind. And so have I. I'm so mean I'm going to call your law firm long distance and tell them to get you out of here and that if they have any sense they'll get rid of you for good."

"Okay," he said. "Here's my office card. The telephone number's on it. But if you don't mind, when you get through I'd like to speak to them for a few minutes. About the paper I found. Really, our firm ought to take it into consideration. In simple justice, you know. After all, Mr. Demarest's cousins may have something on their side. I'm surprised you didn't find that paper yourself. And burn it."

I had seen that curled edge. But so what? It was an old leather box and Nevada's air is dry.

"Why burn it?" Carelessly—as carelessly as I could.

"Well, I'll read it to you. You can judge for yourself."

Torrey took a sheet of onion-skin paper from his shirt pocket. It was knife-creased into folds so it would lay flat. " 'Dear Maggie,' he read, 'I'm a gambler, as you well know. So I'm gambling I won't ever have

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to use this. As a direct letter handed to you. With a notarized copy turned over to my lawyer, to be opened by him in case of my illness. Or death. So I'm writing this and tucking it away, temporarily. But any day now you may be getting it. At the point where I'm sure you're trying to cause my death. Oh, not kill me outright, Maggie. You're too smart a girl for that.

" 'Or if that gamble turns sour and something should happen to me before I finish the letter and send it on to my lawyer, will this letter be found? Or will it rot under this lining and Maggie can go on her lovely icy way? Will my darling Maggie face her own gamble? The gas chamber? Life imprisonment? Or an all male jury that will declare the honey-haired widow was framed? By her own dead husband. There's always that possibility, of course. So, which? If that happens, I'd like to be around to have a crack at the odds.

" 'Maggie, you didn't marry a stupid man. I can read you like a book. You don't love me. You never did. You think I'm a fat, hairy, lecherous—'

"Might have been writing about me, mightn't he?" Torrey put in as an aside. "Well, to go on—

" '—a fat, hairy, lecherous male who acts like he had bought you. Well, I did. With money and with marriage. We've been married barely over half a year, and already you're figuring your value is so high that I've already had all I paid for. So two weeks ago I accidentally bit into one of my heart tablets. You know what that tablet was, Maggie? Of course you do. Chalk and sugar. So if I needed to take one quickly—well, poor old fat, hairy, lecherous Poulton, bye-bye.

" 'None of the hired help switched those tablets, Maggie. They had no possible opportunity. So it was either you or I. And would I have any motive in doing that? But my dear wife who still shares my room—at considerable sacrifice, of course—my dear wife who so solicitously sees to it that my pillbox is kept filled—' "

Torrey stopped. "Go ahead," I said. "Read the rest."

"There isn't any more. Nor is it signed. But the handwriting could easily be checked. If anyone wanted to."

"You do," I said. "So let's get in touch with an expert today. Check it out first thing. But I can see from here what it is. It's Poulton's handwriting. He really hated me, didn't he?"

"Oh, probably not really hated," Torrey said nastily.

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"But naturally some resentment would be aroused in a man if his beautiful wife seemed indifferent to his charms. Especially if he was given to understand he didn't have any. Or if he found some hanky-panky going on with his heart medicine."

"No. Hated," I said. "Because, you see, I didn't switch the tablets. What is more likely, Poulton was trying out some switching himself. The day Poulton died he had his tablets with him. His doctor checked that. The doctor got out here long before I knew Poulton was dead—I was in Reno that day. And the doctor had the tablets he found on Poulton checked at the laboratory. Because Poulton had been dropping hints to him that maybe, in between his checkups, someone was switching his medicine.

"So I think Poulton had some placebos around that he was thinking up some kind of tricky deal with. Or maybe, being Poulton, he even contemplated playing Russian roulette—which tablet was he popping in his mouth, the real one or the placebo? But it was a waste of time. A rattlesnake got him. Although at first everyone thought it was a heart attack. Until they noticed his swollen leg and the marks on it. Now let me see, the police in Reno ought to be able to provide a handwriting expert. I'll phone them right away."

I stopped, stared straight into Torrey, letting what I had said sink in. Then I said, "But first I think I'll call your office. I want them to know that their fine old firm is aiding and abetting a blackmailer."

I stood up to go to the telephone.

"Wait. Let's talk about this first." Torrey's shrewd eyes now looked startled, like a smart-aleck kid's when his nasty trick is discovered too soon. But he was still holding tight onto Poulton's letter. "Why would he write like this if he hadn't believed—"

"A smart man like you ought to be able to figure that out. He wanted to get rid of me. Without alimony. So he started playing with the idea of the letter. Along with having two bottles of tablets. Then he would finish the letter when he figured out what all to say. Send it to his lawyers to open in case he had an attack. Or a fake attack.

"So, pending its final form, he stuck the first draft of the letter under the lining. Just in case I got hold of his keys. But when he finished the letter and was satisfied with it, then one day he would have his heart attack. Take a tablet. It would

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be chalk and sugar. And all the tablets he carried that day in his pillbox would be chalk and sugar. But Poulton would recover in spite of the terrible trick played on him by his wife. Nevertheless, the lawyers would have read the letter by then—wired to them by the doctor, no doubt. And poor Maggie would be kaput, out in the cold, maybe arrested and jailed."

"How do you know all that?" Now that Torrey was shocked into a natural state he looked almost attractive.

"Because I'm a smart woman," I said. "Poulton was a smart man. There's a difference. Now let's call your office. Then the police. Then we'll call Poulton's doctor so you can check on the tablets—you see, the doctor and I have had a private session on this already. You ask him about the rattlesnake bite too. After that you can check with the highway patrol. They flagged me down in the late afternoon on my way home from Reno. One of them drove me back to the mortuary.

"Then if you want to keep yourself busy before you catch your airplane to New York, you can talk to the Indians who found Poulton. I doubt *they* switched his tablets so the doctor wouldn't find placebos. Let's see, is there anyone else we should telephone—oh, yes, about your air reservations—"

Torrey chuckled. He didn't mean it, but he chuckled. "More than ever you ought to be called Diana the Huntress! If you could see those blue eyes flash, but with your face like carved ice— Look, Maggie, let's forget the whole thing—I'm sorry. But you ought to know how it is with men. You really stir up a guy. And when you fought me and called me names and bit me—it was more the names than the fighting, a man can't take that. So let's call off the feud, and just stick to business. We'll clear up what's left of the paperwork, then I'll go back to New York. There's no need for any telephoning."

"All right," I said. "So you tear up Poulton's unfinished hate letter and we'll both watch it burn in the ashtray."

"Look, I believe you. I believe it's exactly the way you said. But after all, this paper was discovered in your husband's private box. I ought to take it back to my firm. Or photostat it as you suggested I do with the other papers. Just in case something is stirred up later, you know. This could be used as some kind of proof in your behalf—along with your explanation, of course."

"You mean, you want to

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take it with you to protect my interests?"

"Something like that."

I looked him square in the eye. And he looked me right back. I could almost have laughed—this was so much like the chess games Poulton made me play until I started beating him. He was trying to figure out the next six or eight moves. With a sly character like Torrey I needed that paper just for my peace of mind no matter how much proof of innocence I might have. With that paper in the hands of Poulton's relatives and Torrey handling their case, the settlement of the estate could drag on for years. He knew that, and he knew I knew it.

"I tell you what," I said. "We'll both fly back to New York and explain this whole thing face to face with your firm. You put that paper back in his box, lock it, and then you keep the key. I'll keep the box—it's mine now that Poulton's dead. We'll fly today, together. That way, you can see that I don't chop open the box with an ax."

"No need for you to trouble. I can take it back for you."

"No. So put the paper back in the box. Now. Before my hunting instinct comes out and I sic fifteen Afghans on you. Or simply call in the ranch boss and a couple of his hands, and take the box, key, paper, and all. They would love to rough up those short pants of yours."

We just looked at each other for a while. Then Torrey tried a kind of laugh. He pulled a big pottery ashtray toward him, crumpled Poulton's note into a ball. "You light it," he said. "So you'll know there's no magician's trick taking place. And then nobody will telephone anybody. About anything. Right?"

"Right," I said. And struck the match. "As soon as you're packed I'll drive you in to Reno. If you can't get a flight today, Reno's a lovely town to stay overnight."

I was waiting in the station wagon when Torrey came out an hour later. Daphne and Nero were lying in the back, their ugly aristocratic heads held high. Daphne smiled at Torrey, but Nero turned his head aside. Afghans are shy with strangers.

"Do you have to take those hounds along?"

"Well, it's like this. You have a playful nature, and you play rough. So do the Afghans."

That was all we said. I concentrated on looking at the land and its Lake, all of it so clean and spare. The blue-green Lake so startling in that austere tan landscape, its pyramid brooding over the water. How

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beautiful the land and how ugly the people.

No use wishing I could cry. Crying had been left out of my system.

As we turned into the highway I looked to the north and saw the rough tufa formations where Poulton had died. Bitten by a rattlesnake! That I had never thought of.

Early on the day Poulton died I told Sarah I was driving into Reno and wouldn't be home until late. I asked Tom, the ranch boss, to have one of his men wash my car. But he said had I forgotten, he and the men had to leave right away to repair fences. The day before he had said they were going to, but I had to make sure they hadn't changed their plans. So I washed the car myself. When I was through and ready to go, Poulton had started on his regular morning walk with Daphne and Nero. He did this every day on doctor's orders. Always with his dogs. Every morning around ten. And usually down our road to the Lake. He didn't like the rough pasture.

I drove past Poulton and the dogs and waved. Poulton jerked his head so that I knew he was giving his version of a contemptuous snort. Since four or five months after we were married, he had hated me. The man was a walking ego, and I had tripped him a lot.

The rise on our land hid the highway along the Lake from view of our private road. From where Poulton was, he couldn't see my car when I reached the turn which led either to Reno or to the north. I turned north. I didn't drive far—just to a rough formation into which I could slip and not be seen.

Hidden by the rocks I blew the special dog whistle I had bought. It was soundless to my ears, but the dogs could hear it. It set them wild. I blew it quickly, several times. Then I ran back to my car and took off for Reno.

I met Daphne and Nero. They flew past my car, shoulder to shoulder, headed toward where the whistle had come. Poulton couldn't, of course, have reached the highway yet. I wasn't even sure that he would follow the dogs. It was only a try. But there's always this: if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Poulton might, of course, have walked back to the house to get the station wagon. The only thing, one of the rear tires on the wagon was flat. I knew, because I had let the air out right after the ranch hands left.

But it would be almost as far back to the garage as to the highway. And Poulton would

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probably walk it to keep the dogs from mauling something. Once running, they would be hard to call back.

I don't know a thing about what happened. Really I don't. I spent the day in Reno. The story came from the Indians on the other side of the Lake. They said they noticed the dogs running up and down the shore, chasing pelicans. They believed the dogs were with someone because they saw a man hurrying in their direction. Later in the afternoon, when the dogs began howling and kept it up, two of the Indians went over to see what happened.

Of all crazy things to happen, it wasn't a heart attack. It was a rattlesnake bite. Heart tablets won't help that. But if they would have, Poulton had the right kind with him. Because he wouldn't have switched them himself if he was going for a walk. What I had thought was, an excited man chasing dogs on a hot day might be slow in getting the tablets out. Or sometimes, even the real tablets are useless. And if not this time, another time, another try.

Oh, yes, indeed, Poulton had the real tablets with him. That day. Would I be stupid enough to give him the chalk and sugar ones I had found stashed away in an unmarked bottle in the pocket of his winter overcoat? I had licked one. It was chalk and sugar, all right.

I only put the chalk and sugar ones in his pillbox for his early morning walk when I would be around. So I could switch them back. Just in case . . .

"So long, Torrey," I said when I let him off at the Mapes Hotel. "You made a real good try."

"Oh, well, I'm a young man," he said. "If at first you don't succeed—"

I took off without hearing the rest.

Like I said, no use wishing I could cry.

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THE WILL-O'-THE-WISP MYSTERY

Part Five: *The Queen*

by MR. X

What has gone before: When a masked gang hijacks a prison van and aids the escape of six convicted criminals, Sheriff Barker and Inspector Fleming turn to David Piper, known as The Manhunter, for assistance. Piper, Director of the state's Department of Apprehension, has numerous underworld contacts, including the one-eyed Tommy. Piper learns that the gang was paid a large sum of money to pull the job. He suspects at first that the six are linked in some projected crime, but gradually the escapees begin to turn up. Forger Joe Reilly is arrested at an art gallery, and swindler Charlie Hall is found murdered in a downtown hotel room. Piper tracks down Hall's killer, but the case becomes bizarre when someone steals the corpse's head from the city morgue—apparently in an attempt to hide the fact that Hall was drugged with sleeping pills at the time of his murder.

Learning from Tommy One-Eye that underworld kingpin Nick Bruno, one of the six, is again running his rackets from a secret hideout, Piper arranges to meet his chief aide, Sammy Sargent. In an apparent effort to buy time for his boss, Sargent tips Piper as to the whereabouts of another of the six—bank robber Jack Larner. Piper captures him after a

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daring robbery at the local airport, but he can find no connection among these three except for a theatrical agent named Marc Litzen, who keeps reappearing in the case.

Abandoning his theory of a planned crime involving the six escapees, Nick tracks down the fourth member of the group at a local trailer park. Hugh Courtney, a con man convicted of murder, convinces Piper that he was innocent of the killing and Piper finds the real killer.

With four out of the way, only Bruno and Kate Gallery remain at large. Then Piper receives a call from his designer wife in New York. She has known Kate in the past, and she tells Piper, "David, I must see you! My friend is here!"

"Your friend?"

"The girl who escaped from that prison van—Kate Gallery. She's here with me now and she has to see you. She knows something about the escape—and she's afraid, David. She's terribly afraid!"

It had been more than a month since David Piper last saw his wife, but such absences were far from unusual. Jennie lived in a fashionable duplex overlooking the East River, and her annual income from designing was just about three times the salary he received as head of the state's Department of Apprehension. This fact had never really come between them, but it helped explain the reason why they lived and worked apart so much of the time. They were, as a friend had once remarked, simply two very stubborn people. Too stubborn even to get a divorce.

Jennie Piper was tall and slim, with the body of a fashion model and a face that would have easily passed for thirty. She and David had been married, off and on, for twelve years, living their own lives for most of that time. He usually tried to get down to New York at least once a month, but the past few weeks had been too busy for him to manage it. Now, standing before her door on business, he felt like a stranger.

"You made good time," she said as she opened the door. "Traffic must have been light." There was no need for the usual hellos between them, and Jennie had never been one to waste words.

"How've you been?"

"Busy! The spring buyers are in town."

"It's not even winter yet."

"You know how it is," she said with a shrug. It was her favorite expression, but in truth he'd never known how it was.

"Where's Kate Gallery?"

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"In the bedroom."

"Harboring an escaped murderess is a criminal offense, Jennie."

"I called you, didn't I?" She gave him a mocking smile that showed off her glistening white teeth. "You're The Manhunter—you're in charge of the case."

"All right. Let's go talk to her."

"This way, David."

"I remember where the bedroom is."

She glanced sideways at him from beneath long lashes. "I wasn't sure you did."

Kate Gallery was sitting on the edge of the unmade bed, fully dressed, wearing a Paris original he knew must have come from Jennie's closet. The women were about the same size, though where Jennie's youth was a calculated, manufactured thing, Kate's was fresh and natural. She looked no more than 20, though he knew from her files that she was five years older. In any event, she looked too young to be a murderess.

"I'm David Piper," he said.

She stood, facing him directly, and for a moment he thought she might offer her wrists for his handcuffs. "Your wife has been very kind to me."

"Too kind, I'm afraid. I'll have to take you back, of course."

"I can't believe she killed anyone," Jennie said.

"There's not much doubt. You did kill your husband, didn't you, Mrs. Gallery?"

"Yes. I've never denied it."

"The two of you were separated. He came to the house one night and you refused to let him in. As he turned and walked away, you fired both barrels of a shotgun at his back, killing him."

"Those are the facts," she said. "I said at my trial that he'd threatened me. I pleaded self-defense."

"It's hard to believe it was self-defense when he had his back to you and was walking away. The jury didn't buy it, and I'm afraid I don't, either." He motioned her toward a chair and took her former position on the edge of the bed. "But right now I'm not so interested in your crime as I am in what Jennie told me on the phone. She said that you knew something about the prison-van escape—and that you were afraid."

Kate Gallery nodded her blonde head. "It all ties in together. My husband—Bill—was involved with some shady people."

"What sort of people? What did he do for a living?"

"He was vice-president of a firm called Landmark Inter-

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national. They buy up land in foreign countries for American firms planning expansion overseas."

"Sounds like an important position for a young man."

"Bill was ten years older than Kate," Jennie interrupted to explain. "Would you like something to drink, David?"

"Too early in the day for me, but you go ahead." He turned his attention back to Kate Gallery, noticing for the first time the high cheekbones that he had observed in her photograph. They seemed to show only when she didn't smile, and robbed her of the youthful freshness he had so admired. This, he decided, was what she had looked like the moment she squeezed the twin triggers of the shotgun.

"It was all tied in with Landmark International," she went on. "After Bill's—death, they came to me and offered to pay my trial expenses if I kept quiet about his work."

"What was so strange about his work?"

"I don't know," she said, looking away. She didn't make a good liar. "But they thought I knew something, so I let them pay the expenses. They wanted to get me off, I think, because they were afraid if I went to prison I might start talking. Well, when the jury found me guilty they had to do something else. So they arranged the escape."

Piper sat forward on the bed. Was it possible? "You mean the whole escape was arranged just to free you?"

"I think so, I really do. These are powerful people, with lots of money behind them. Why else would that Sheriff decide at the last minute that I should ride in the prison van rather than in a separate car?"

"You think Sheriff Barker was involved in your escape?"

"He must have been. He's the one who decided who went in the van, and his choice was quite arbitrary. I'd been held in the county jail for two weeks before he decided to send me to the penitentiary."

"That's true," Piper had to admit. "But once they'd helped you escape, did they reveal any of this to you?"

"I didn't wait to find out. They transferred me to a car with one of the male prisoners —a man named Larner. I don't know what they had planned for me, because when the car stopped for a traffic light I opened the door and jumped out."

"You ran away?"

"I sure did! Across an empty lot, thinking at any minute they might start shooting. But of course they didn't. There were

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too many other cars around."

"You feared they rescued you to kill you? But couldn't they have done that in prison?"

"A male convict can be knifed in the prison yard or mess hall quite easily. It's much more difficult to kill a woman in prison, since usually she's only in the company of other women."

David Piper frowned. "You seem to know a lot about prisons."

"I did some off-Broadway acting during my modeling days. One part was in a prison drama. I never thought then that I'd be living it."

"Jennie said you were terribly afraid. Of what?"

"That they'll find me and kill me! Isn't that reason enough to be afraid?"

"Frankly, Mrs. Gallery, I can't believe that the escape was engineered for the purpose you think. It was much more likely an attempt to free Nick Bruno and return him to his rackets. It was a highly professional job, with a great deal of money behind it. Bruno is the only one who would be worth it, unless some major crime was being planned."

"Then you feel my fears are groundless?"

"Groundless or not, the best place for you is back in the Raker County Jail."

"And if Sheriff Barker is involved?"

"I have every faith in Sheriff Barker."

"Do you?" She stood up, nervously lighting a cigarette. "The Sheriff in Raker County has always been politically active, tied to the party in power. Sheriff Barker is no different. He can be bought, like any politician."

Piper sighed and glanced at his wife. He knew she wanted him to give this woman some sort of help, "Where is the Landmark International office located?"

"Here in Manhattan, on Lexington Avenue."

"I'll talk to them, try to determine if they've any connection with the escape. Meanwhile, you stay here, Mrs. Gallery. Jennie, I'm holding you responsible if she runs away."

Kate Gallery shook her blonde head. "If I wanted to run, I wouldn't have waited here for you. I just want to get out of this alive. I'm trying for a new trial on the murder charge, and I want to live long enough to get it."

Piper rose. "I'll be back, but don't expect much. I'm just going down to their office and nose around."

They left Kate Gallery in the bedroom and Jennie walked

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him to the door. "Thank you for trying to help her, David. I appreciate it."

"You always had a poor choice of friends, Jennie."

"David—"

He saw her anger building and let himself out of the door. "Keep an eye on her."

The day had turned suddenly cold, and he could detect a few snow flurries drifting from the slate-gray sky as he hurried along Lexington Avenue. November snow was commonplace in Raker County, but it was rarer in New York. It brought only grumbles from a few of the pedestrians who bothered to notice it at all.

He reached the offices of Landmark International just after the lunch hour, when the miniskirted secretaries were still congregated about the reception desk, chatting and giggling. It seemed to be a large operation, with glimpses of corridors that led off to long rows of cubicled offices. He asked the receptionist for someone who knew about Bill Gallery's business activities, and after a ten-minute wait he was ushered into one of the plush executive offices.

The man who rose to greet him was flabby and balding. He looked the way a bank president used to look, and talked like one. "I'm Waldo Forester," he said, extending a chubby hand. "Perhaps I can be of help. As you probably know, Bill Gallery has been dead for almost a year now."

"That's what I came about." Piper showed his credentials.

"You're a detective?"

"Not exactly. I apprehend escaped prisoners and help find missing persons. As you may know, we had an escape up in Raker County recently. Two of the prisoners are still at large, and one is Kate Gallery, the widow of Bill Gallery."

"Widow!" Waldo Forester snorted. "She killed him!"

"That still makes her a widow. I understand from my investigation so far that she killed him in self-defense, because she was afraid of him."

"She shot him in the back, and a jury convicted her."

"What was her husband working on for your firm?"

Forester seemed to grow short of breath. He rose to his feet and began a series of simple calisthenics. It was a full minute before he answered. "He had several accounts. We purchase overseas land for American investors, as you probably know. I couldn't discuss any individual account of his. Frankly, I doubt if I even remember just what he was working on."

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"I see."

The flabby man was bending, trying to touch his toes in an impossible maneuver. Finally he straightened up, breathing harder than ever. "Just what did you want to know?" he asked, almost surprised that Piper was still there.

"Why is Kate Gallery afraid of you? Why was she afraid of her husband?"

"I have no idea. Any fear of Landmark International as an organization could only be some sort of neurosis, of course."

"Perhaps. In any event, I wonder if I might speak to some of Gallery's friends here."

"Friends? He had no close friends here."

"But there must have been someone—"

Waldo Forester raised a hand to signal his dismissal. "I've given you quite enough time, Mr. Piper. Landmark International is in no way involved with this affair."

"What about Kate Gallery's escape? Are you involved with that?" The man's attitude was rapidly forcing Piper to believe the wildest parts of the girl's story.

"Certainly not! I think it's time you left." He pushed a desk buzzer and a secretary appeared almost at once.

Following her out, down the long corridor of glassed-in cubicles, Piper asked, "Are any of Bill Gallery's friends still with the company?"

The girl thought about it before replying. Finally she said, "Not really. I knew him, of course, but not well. I suppose Eddie Gibbons was his closest friend."

"Gibbons? Where's he now?"

"Funny thing. He was killed just two weeks before Bill."

"Killed?" Piper came alert.

"Oh, it was nothing like Bill Gallery. No family trouble. He was found dead in a hotel room right here in Manhattan. The police never solved it."

"I see." They had reached the main reception room, but Piper had to try for one more answer. "They worked together, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "In fact, they'd just gotten back from Mexico City the day before Eddie was killed."

Piper smiled. "Thank you. You've been a great help." He left the office and went down into Lexington Avenue.

David Piper had a number of old friends in the New York Police Department, and this day he sought out a detective named Blake who was assigned to the precinct where Eddie Gibbons had died. He told

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Blake what he wanted, and the younger man scratched his head.

"A murder in a hotel room a year ago! My memory's not that good, David."

"Could you check it? The New York Times Index at the library gave me the basic information. The date was Tuesday, November 11th, and the hotel was the Harding, on Seventh Avenue. That's in your area, isn't it?"

A flicker of memory came into the detective's eyes. "I think I do remember it now. Eddie Gibbons, you say?"

"That's right."

"Let me get the file." He was back in five minutes with a fat manila envelope, nodding his head as he glanced through the typewritten reports. "Sure, I've pegged it now. I wasn't in on the beginning, but I did some of the legwork on it."

"Tell me what you've got."

"Eddie Gibbons and another man checked into the hotel together shortly after noon. A chambermaid bringing extra towels found his body about two hours later. The other man, who registered as George Sand, had disappeared."

"Gibbons registered under his own name?"

"Yes. He was a bachelor. He had no reason to hide anything, apparently."

Piper nodded. He was beginning to see a light. "You think it was a homosexual killing?"

"Could be."

"How was he killed?"

"Stabbed with a Mexican dagger. He'd just bought it on a trip a few days earlier."

"You never found any trace of this Sand fellow?"

"None. We were concentrating on people he worked with at Landmark International, but nothing turned up. The room clerk's description was vague."

Piper glanced through the reports. "What about a fellow named Bill Gallery? Did you question him?"

"Gallery? Sure, I talked to him myself. We wanted to know about this trip the two of them took to Mexico City. It was company business, though. No sign of anything irregular. They had separate rooms at the hotel in Mexico."

"Anything in Gibbons' background to indicate he was a homosexual?"

"No, but why else check into a hotel room at high noon with another man, in the city where you live?"

"Just where did he live?"

"With his sister, down in Greenwich Village."

Piper made a note of the address. He didn't know if the

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sister would still be living there, but it was worth a try. Landmark International had lost two employees in as many weeks, and there just might be a connection with the firm's somewhat secretive activities. If Kate Gallery didn't want to talk about those activities, perhaps the sister of Eddie Gibbons would.

When Piper reached the Greenwich Village apartment, a little before five, there was no answer to his ring. He decided that Stella Gibbons must be at work somewhere, and he found a nearby coffeehouse where he could kill an hour before trying again.

On the second attempt he was more successful. The door was opened by a pale girl with long brown hair that reached past her shoulders. She was a typical Village sort, with miniskirt, black stockings, and a vaguely hostile expression.

"Yes? What do you want?"

"Are you Stella Gibbons?"

"That's me."

He showed his credentials. "I want to ask you about your brother's murder last year."

"Don't you guys ever quit? Eddie's dead and buried."

But she stepped aside to let him enter, and as the overhead light struck her face he saw that she was older than he'd supposed. Despite the youthful costume, he guessed her to be close to 30. "Your brother worked for Landmark International, didn't he?"

"That's right."

"Could I ask where you work?"

"I'm the afternoon cashier at a movie theater. What does that have to do with Eddie?"

"Nothing. What did he do for the Landmark people?"

She shrugged. "Traveled a lot. Scouted for land in foreign countries."

"What sort of land? For what purpose?"

"How should I know?"

"Miss Gibbons, wasn't it a bit odd for your brother to be living here with you?"

"Odd? No. Actually, I was living with him. I'd just come to New York and I hadn't found a place of my own yet. He had this apartment and offered to share it for a few months. After he was killed I just kept it."

"Did he ever mention a coworker named Bill Gallery?"

"Sure, they went to Mexico just before Eddie was killed."

"What about Gallery's wife, Kate?"

"Eddie told me they were separated. Two weeks after Eddie died, Gallery's wife shot him, somewhere upstate."

"Did you ever meet Bill Gallery?"

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"At the funeral parlor. He came when Eddie was—laid out." Her composure was beginning to crack at the memory.

"Just one more question, Miss Gibbons, and then I'll go. I'm sorry to ask it, but I have to. Was there ever any reason to believe your brother was a homosexual?"

"The police already asked it. No, there wasn't. He was always popular with girls."

"No hint of anything between him and Gallery?"

"No."

"Thank you, Miss Gibbons. I'm sorry I had to bother you."

He was starting down the stairs when she said, perhaps as an afterthought, "If you're looking for queers, go talk to Eddie's old boss, Waldo Forester. That guy's as queer as they come."

"You know Forester?"

"He came down here a few times, with work for Eddie. I hated the sight of him."

Piper thanked her again and left. There was too much to think about, and the hell of it was that he didn't know if any of it was leading him toward a solution of the prison break. But he did know that a man named Eddie Gibbons had died in a hotel room, just as one of the escaped convicts, Charlie Hall, had died in a hotel room. There might, just might, be a connection.

Jennie opened the door and stepped aside to let him enter. She was wearing bright-red lounging pajamas and a silk scarf gathered about her neck, and he decided that this must be for his benefit. He appreciated it, though he was careful not to acknowledge it. "How's Kate Gallery?" he asked.

"Fine. She didn't run away, if that's what you're thinking."

Kate herself appeared at the kitchen door, a dish towel in her hand. "You missed dinner."

"I grabbed a sandwich."

"You were gone all day," Jennie observed. "Did you find out anything?"

"I talked to a few people, and I found out a few things. Right now I have some questions to ask you, Mrs. Gallery."

"Go ahead." She left the towel on the kitchen counter and came in to join them.

"Tell me about Eddie Gibbons."

Her face went pale for a moment and she had to sit down. "It's been a long time since I've heard that name."

"He was a friend of your husband's, wasn't he?"

"Yes. They worked together at Landmark International."

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"You knew him?"

"Bill and I visited his apartment in the Village a few times."

"Why didn't you tell me he was murdered just two weeks before Bill?"

"I didn't think there was any connection."

"Maybe there wasn't," Piper said. "But I've known cases where news of one killing caused a whole chain of reaction. It's catching sometimes, like a virus."

"David!" Jennie was upset, and showed it. "Let's not make things any worse than they are."

"You asked me to help. I'm trying to, but it's difficult without all the facts. What was Landmark International involved in, Mrs. Gallery? Why was Gibbons killed, and why did you fear your husband enough to shoot him?"

"All right!" she exclaimed angrily. "I'll tell you everything I know! Then you can take me back up to that jail of yours and be done with it!" She let a moment pass while she steadied herself and then she began to talk. "Bill and I separated in October of last year, about a month before he—died. There were plenty of reasons for it, I suppose. His job kept him away a lot—sometimes I wouldn't see him for weeks on end. Even when he was in New York he often stayed over at Eddie Gibbons' apartment rather than take the long train ride up to Raker County every night."

"Wasn't Gibbons' sister living with him?"

"Not steady. She came and went, I understand. Bill never met her till after Gibbons was killed."

"Go on."

"Anyway, we separated. I kept the house upstate and he stayed in New York. He called every few days, and we kept in touch, but that was it. I remember he told me Landmark was sending him to Mexico City on business and that Eddie was going along. This must have been in early November. He was gone about a week, and then he called one night—a Monday, it was—to say they were back.

"Well, now comes the strange part. I had to come into New York the following day to do some banking. I'd kept an account here since my modeling days, and I wanted to make certain Bill couldn't somehow draw the money out. I took care of my business, and I was just coming out of the bank when I ran into Bill himself."

"About what time of day was this?"

"I'd say around two o'clock. He was quite nervous and

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seemed to be in a hurry. I asked him how Mexico was, but he didn't really tell me. All he did was warn me never to talk about Landmark International, or the kind of work he did. Then he just left me."

"Strange," Piper agreed. "But now perhaps it's time you did tell me about the kind of work he did."

"One other thing first. The next morning I read in the papers about Eddie Gibbons. One article said that a man's tie clasp with an amethyst birthstone was found in the room with the body. I'd given Bill a tie clasp like that for our first anniversary."

"Did you tell this to the police?"

"Of course not. It didn't really prove anything. There are probably a million of them around. I did phone Bill, though, and asked him about Eddie's murder. Just asked him. He said it was a terrible thing, and he didn't know what had happened."

"I see. Now to get back. What about Landmark?"

"Well, it's all tied in together. Because over the next two weeks Bill started phoning me day and night. He seemed afraid that I had some knowledge that might harm him. Perhaps he guessed I'd read about the tie clasp. In any event, he kept warning me that he worked for dangerous men, that if I talked to anybody my life might be in danger. And then that night, the night it happened—"

The door buzzer sounded and Jennie glanced up. "It's probably the newsboy, making his collection. I'll get it."

"—the night it happened," Kate Gallery hurried on, "I was alone at home. The shotgun was his. He'd left a lot of stuff when he moved out. Since I'd been alone, I kept it loaded, in the front closet, just in case of prowlers. Anyway, he came over that night, and I think he'd been drinking or something. He stood there in the doorway and told me that if I ever said anything about the fields he'd kill me."

"The fields?"

"Yes. The—"

Piper heard Jennie gasp and he whirled around in his chair. Two bulky men had pushed past her into the room. One was a stranger. The other was Waldo Forester.

David Piper rose slowly to his feet. He didn't know if either man was armed, but he wasn't taking any chances. "Well, Mr. Forester, I didn't expect to see you again so soon."

"You're seeing me," the flabby man said.

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"How did you find us here?" Piper was keeping his voice deliberately calm.

"I had Steve here follow you when you left the office, after I saw you questioning my secretary."

Steve was a hulking strong-arm man of a type Piper knew only too well. The prisons were full of them. He leaned against the wall with a smirk on his face, and Piper silently cursed himself for allowing such an obvious hood to follow him without spotting him.

"What do you want?" Piper asked.

"Just to talk. To find out what in hell you're after, Piper." The mask of friendliness had dropped completely away, and he was just a cheap tough guy like all the rest Piper had known in his time.

"I'm after some escaped prisoners. One of them, Kate Gallery, is right here, but she's raised some very interesting questions about your company. She seems to think that her life has been in danger because of something she knows."

"Nuts!"

"Did you offer to pay her court costs?"

"Sure. Her husband was our employee. We look after any employee's family."

"Even in a case like this? I doubt it very much."

"We don't have cases like this often."

"What about Eddie Gibbons? He was murdered too."

"Gibbons was murdered by some queen in a hotel room. It has nothing to do with Landmark International."

"A queen? You mean a homosexual?"

"Sure. That's what Gibbons was."

Piper glanced from Forester to the smirking Steve. Behind him he heard Kate Gallery starting to sob. He turned to her. "Mrs. Gallery, suppose you finish telling me about the fields."

Steve moved from the wall, coming in fast, but Piper was faster. His foot shot out and caught the big man at the ankles. As Steve crashed to the floor, the flabby Waldo Forester moved too, but Piper twisted to one side and brought out his gun.

Behind him, close to him, Kate Gallery was talking at last. "The fields are in Mexico. They're fields for growing marijuana. Landmark International has been buying them up for the big tobacco companies, in case the government should some day legalize it."

Later, when Forester and Steve were gone, Piper allowed

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himself a moment's relaxation. Jennie came and sat next to him on the sofa. "You were good, David. Very good."

"Thanks. It's my job."

"But you should have had them arrested."

"They had no weapons. They just came here to scare us. Only we scared them instead. When I get back home I'll have a detective friend of mine check up on them. It would appear, though, that they're within the law so far. Buying up land in Mexico is no crime, and apparently they wouldn't use it for marijuana unless the law in this country changed."

"What they feared was bad public relations for their clients," Kate Gallery explained. "They were willing to pay my trial expenses just to keep the facts from getting out. The tobacco companies would have been most embarrassed by the disclosure at this time, when the debate about marijuana is still raging."

"But what about this Eddie Gibbons?" Jennie asked. "Was he killed because of it, or was his murderer a homosexual as Forester said?"

Piper turned to Kate. "I think Mrs. Gallery can answer that question for us, because the murder of Eddie Gibbons was the direct cause of her killing her husband."

Jennie snapped her fingers. "The tie clasp! She killed him because he murdered Eddie Gibbons!"

Piper shook his head and took a step toward Kate Gallery. "No, you've got it backward. She killed him because he knew *she* murdered Eddie Gibbons."

Driving back, his headlights cutting through the night with its scattering of snow flurries, David Piper told her, "I'm sorry about the handcuffs, Mrs. Gallery, but I can't take any chances on you."

She shifted in her seat and spoke for the first time since they had left Manhattan. "That's all right. One murder or two—what's the difference? I just thought I could beat the rap on Bill's killing, but I knew I didn't have a chance with Eddie's."

"You and Eddie were having an affair?"

"Sure. That's why Bill left me in the first place. Then when they were in Mexico together, I think Bill talked him into dropping me. At least when he came back he told me we were finished, that day in the hotel room. I picked up the Mexican dagger he'd brought to show me and stabbed him with it." She looked sideways at him. "But how did you know,

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after all this time? Why didn't you believe the homosexual story?"

"Eddie Gibbons registered under his own name, and his companion registered as George Sand. The name Eddie Gibbons is close to Edward Gibbon, the Eighteenth Century author and historian. It seemed more than a coincidence that his companion was George Sand, a Nineteenth Century woman writer famed for dressing in men's clothes. Rather than a homosexual queen, I started thinking about a female-type 'queen.' One who dressed in man's clothes when she kept her assignations with Eddie Gibbons."

"Maybe that makes it a woman, but it doesn't make it me."

"A tie clasp like your husband's was found in the room. But I never believed your husband was the mysterious Sand. Why go to a hotel with Gibbons after spending a week in Mexico with him? No, Sand was someone else, and most probably a woman. If the tie clasp really was Bill's, it occurred to me that you could have been wearing it, along with other articles of clothing he'd left behind. That would also explain the deception. Gibbons had nothing to hide, especially if he was breaking off with you, but you still did. You couldn't afford to be seen at a hotel with him and thereby give your husband evidence for a divorce."

"You think I could pass as a man?"

"Why not, for the few seconds the desk clerk saw you? After all, you said yourself that you'd been an actress off-Broadway. Maybe you even played a man's role in that prison drama you mentioned."

"You didn't trust me from the beginning, did you?"

"I half trusted you until you lied to me." He turned the car off the expressway at the Raker County exit.

"Lied to you?"

"You said you were in New York doing some banking the day Gibbons was killed. You even said you ran into your husband as you were leaving the bank. But Gibbons was killed last November 11th. That's Veterans Day, and the banks in New York and most other states are closed that day."

She told him then, as they drove downtown, about how Bill had come to her and accused her of killing Gibbons. He asked for his tie clasp, and when she couldn't produce it he said he was going to the police with what he knew. That was when she'd shot him, as he was

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walking away down the front walk, and made up the story about his threatening her. She thought the jury might buy it, but they hadn't. She even tried to drag Landmark International into it, but in the end even that had been unsuccessful.

Piper listened with only half a mind, because something else was troubling him now. It was a thought she'd planted in his mind, about Sheriff Barker.

Barker.

He saw the lights of the jail ahead, saw the light in Barker's office, and felt that he was nearly to the end of something.

She had said that Sheriff Barker must be involved, and now of course he saw the truth of that. The truth that should have been obvious all along, but a truth he'd discounted because the papers were already on Barker's neck.

But of course it had to be Barker. Whether one or two or all six convicts were the goal, only one man knew when they'd leave the jail. Only one man knew which ones would be in that prison van, which ones would be chosen after weeks of waiting for the drive to the pen. Kate Gallery had been picked only at the last minute, again by Barker. It would have been the same with the others. No time for anyone to get word outside. No time for the smoke bombs and the guns and the getaway cars. No time unless Sheriff Barker was in on the whole damned thing. This time it was no will-o'-the-wisp. This time he was certain.

Piper left the girl with the deputies downstairs and took the elevator to Barker's office. The halls were dark here, because it was almost midnight, but he could see the lighted office at the end, beckoning him.

Barker, you crook.

He felt that the end was very close now. Only Nick Bruno, the King, remained at large, and he had the feeling Sheriff Barker would be able to tell him just where the King's castle was.

Piper pushed open the door and faced the man behind the desk. "Barker, I've come—"

He moved closer and saw that Barker wasn't listening. Something — an icepick — had gone in under his ribs and probably hit his heart. Sheriff Barker was dead.

(to be concluded next month)

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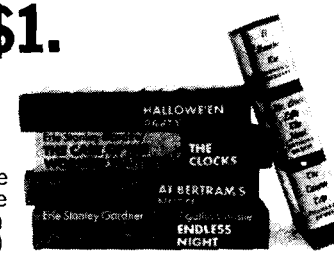

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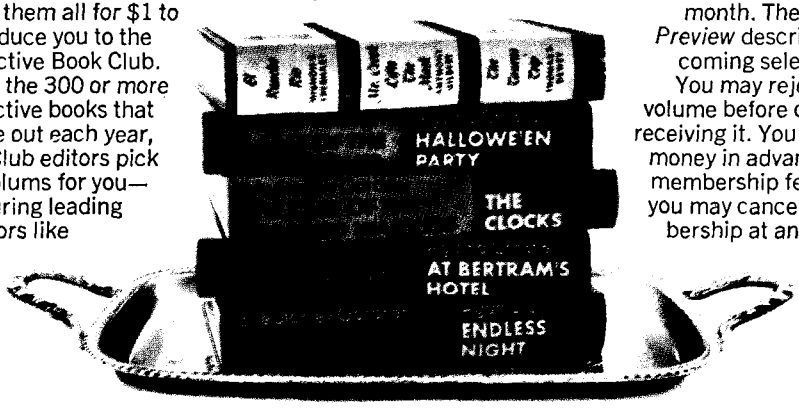

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